At Heart a Rake

Florence Marryat


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AT HEART A RAKE

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BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT

AUTHOR OF "THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL," "PARSON JONES," "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "MY SISTER THE ACTRESS," "MY OWN CHILD," "THERE IS NO DEATH," ETC., ETC.

"Men, some to business, some to pleasure take;
But every woman is at heart a rake:"
—POPE.

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AT HEART A RAKE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MACNAUGHTENS AT HOME.

MR. RONALD MACNAUGHTEN sat opposite to his wife, Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, at the dinner table in their house in Hill Street, Berkeley Square. He was a handsome, fashionable-looking man of seven-and-twenty, and she was one of the acknowledged beauties of the season. They possessed youth, wealth, birth, and good looks, and yet neither of them seemed happy, nor even contented.

Lady Phyllis was the fifth daughter of the Earl of Lisnor, of Sedgeley Manor, in Hampshire, and Ronald Macnaughten had some of the oldest and bluest blood in Scotland running in his veins, and was prouder of his clansmen than he would have been of claiming lineage with the highest title in the United Kingdom. Like most men of his nationality, he was exceedingly proud—quick to resent an insult, and rather hot-tempered—passionate in every way, in fact, but with feelings so deep that, when once attracted, they were not easily detached again. He was a clever young man, with a power of concentration of intellect which would have made him capable of achieving great things in one of the learned professions; and it was rather a misfortune than otherwise that he had inherited so large a fortune from his late father that it had not been thought necessary to bring him up to work for his living. He had been married to Lady Phyllis for

four years—theirs had been purely a love match—and they had never yet encountered any serious cause for disagreement. But, with their abundance of this world's goods, they had not been called upon to do anything more than to amuse themselves.

The room they occupied was sufficient proof of the style in which they lived. It was a lofty apartment of perhaps forty feet by twenty-five—furnished in the most sumptuous manner. The Persian carpet which covered the floor was so thick as to break the heaviest footfall—the massively carved sideboard was loaded with silver and cut glass—the chandelier which hung over the dining table, and threw the soft light of wax candles upon the various flowers and fruit that adorned it, was of pale green venetian glass. Around the walls were hung paintings; not too many, but all good of their kind. Conspicuous among them were the portraits of the master and mistress of the house, taken on the occasion of their marriage, by one of the most celebrated portrait-painters of the time. That of Lady Phyllis occupied the place of honor on the right side of the mantelpiece. It represented her in a white dress, her hands filled with flowers, and the smiling, innocent maiden of eighteen seemed to gaze wistfully at the juvenile matron of twenty-two as if she would ask what had happened to cause so great a change in her. Not that Lady Phyllis was any less beautiful than she had been four years before. On the contrary, marriage and motherhood had only served to ripen and enhance her charms. But she looked more serious, and she certainly was more silent than had been her wont. Mr. Macnaughten, regarding her from the opposite side of the table, over the silver *épergne* of ferns and flowers, wondered listlessly where the difference lay. The butler kept offering her wine, and the powdered footman handed her delicate dishes in succession. She only uttered languidly "No!" to each one of them. At last her husband observed her want of appetite.

"Are you not going to eat anything to-night?" he said.

"If ever you took the trouble to look at me," she answered, somewhat pettishly, "you would know that I never eat anything at this hour! I hate late dinners!"

"Why? Because I happen to like them?" he said sarcastically, as he helped himself a second time to a ragout that the servant handed him.

Lady Phyllis answered nothing. The expression of her face, as she gently waved her ostrich fan to and fro, indicated that she did not consider his remark worthy of a reply.

Macnaughten looked at her. She was lovelier than usual, if possible, that evening, attired in a robe of the palest pink crape, trimmed with marabout feathers of the same tint as her fan.

"You look very 'fit.' Are we going out again to-night?" he inquired, as his eyes were bent admiringly on her.

"I have a box for the Gaiety. But perhaps you have made other plans. If so, pray don't let mine interfere with them. I can look after myself perfectly well. My cousin will meet me at the theater."

"I shall accompany you," he replied indifferently. There was a silence between them of some minutes after that, broken by himself.

"Have you had any callers to-day, Phyllis?"

"No one of any consequence. Mrs. Pryce and Captain Nelson, and Lady Salcott, and—and—Percy Sefton."

"Lord Percy Sefton appears to be a standing dish in this establishment," said Mr. Macnaughten, with a frown. "Couldn't you make him understand that a little of him goes a long way?"

"What! when he's my own cousin? That would be extremely polite! It may be the fashion in Scotland to give people broad hints to make themselves scarce, but we are not quite so barbaric in England."

"It's politer than kicking them out," remarked Macnaughten significantly. "Why, Sefton is here almost every day. How you can stand the conversation of such an idiot beats me! He can talk nothing but himself."

"Well! you can hardly expect me to sit at home all the afternoon and receive no one," retorted his wife. "You don't take much pains to amuse me yourself."

"The time is past when I had the power to do so."

"Had you ever the power?" she asked, in an aggra-

vating manner. "It isn't every clever man that can make himself amusing. It requires a particular tact, a knowledge of men and women which you have never taken the trouble to acquire."

"You should rather say, a stock of small gossip—an impertinent curiosity about matters that concern no one but the persons interested in them—a power of magnifying every molehill into a mountain for the benefit of the idle and inquisitive. You are right, Phyllis. I have never taken the trouble to acquire so mean a virtue and I never shall."

"And are not, in consequence, amusing," said Lady Phyllis, as she rose from the table and left the room to assume her mantle and wraps.

Macnaughten sat where she left him, thoughtful and introspective! What was it that had come into their lives? He could recall the time when they had been foolishly unhappy when separated, if only for a little while—when they had counted the hours spent apart, and flown into each other's arms with rapture as soon as reunited. He could remember when their passionate, overwhelming love had kept them awake at night, counting the moments till they should meet again—and now, it seemed as if parting would be rather a relief than otherwise to both of them. What a little chatterbox Phyllis used to be in the first months of their married life. She seemed never weary of telling him her thoughts and ideas on all sorts of subjects, and now she scarcely opened her mouth when they were alone together, and grew impatient if he talked to her. And yet she was an unusually animated woman in society, rather celebrated for her brilliant repartees and the bright, witty manner in which she related anything for the benefit of her audience; a woman who could amuse a stranger for a whole evening and inspire him with the utmost admiration for her physical and mental charms. How was it? How had the change come about?

Not that Ronald Macnaughten suspected his wife of caring for any man more than for himself. He was a true and faithful husband to her, and it is only faithless husbands—those who know what they are to other men's

wives—who stoop to suspect their own. But the gloss seemed to be wearing off their married life, and he did not hold himself entirely guiltless in the matter. He, too, often felt the same sense of dullness and *ennui* that Phyllis seemed to feel, and enjoyed an evening spent with his friends far more than those at home. He was conscious that Mrs. Leyton's singing appealed to him more than that of his wife (though there was a time when he considered Lady Phyllis' voice the sweetest he had ever heard), and that he felt livelier and better able to talk in any company but hers. How was it? Whence had it come? He had loved her passionately, and he told himself that he loved her passionately still; and yet he was happier away—with his own sex in the shooting field or the smoking concert, or with the other in a drawing room or the box of a theater. These thoughts made his handsome face look harassed and careworn, and the light way in which Phyllis had taken lately to speaking of acts of feminine carelessness and folly at which formerly she would have shuddered, troubled him still more. Surely, surely—she could never arrive at the pitch of approving of the fast manners and appearance of some of the women of the present day—of upholding them in their acts of rebellion and attempts to procure an unseemly liberty. And then Macnaughten thought that perhaps that little fool Percy Sefton encouraged Phyllis in these absurd ideas, and he ground his teeth in consequence.

At that juncture his wife re-entered the room. She was looking lovely—a wife of whom any man might have been proud—yet Macnaughten put her cloak about her snowy shoulders without a compliment or a caress. He had given her so many caresses which she had neither returned nor seemed to appreciate; and, to tell the truth, he was becoming a little tired of kissing her himself. Half the charm of a kiss lies in the pleasure it is supposed to bestow, and though the French say there is always one who kisses and one who holds out the cheek, the man is a fool who goes on kissing under the circumstances. But there was one thing which Mr. Macnaughten evidently *did* miss, for he asked presently:

"Where is Roy?"

"Upstairs, with Reynolds," replied Lady Phyllis carelessly. "Do you wish to see him?"

"Why, of course I wish to see him! Do I ever go out without saying good-night to my little boy?"

"*I* said good-night to him upstairs," replied Lady Phyllls; "but, if you wish to see him, you must ring the nursery bell. Be quick though, for the carriage has been standing at the door for some time."

"Oh, d—— the carriage!" exclaimed Macnaughten, as he pulled the bell furiously and ordered his son and heir to be brought downstairs at once.

Little Roy, now three years old, quite justified the pride taken in him by both his young parents. As he burst into the dining room, in his embroidered frock, with a sash of the Macnaughten plaid tied round his waist, his father caught him up in an ecstasy of delight. The baby had his mother's loveliness combined with his father's strength, and was a very beautiful specimen of childhood. Reynolds, the head nurse, who appeared immediately in his wake, was almost as proud of her charge as his parents were, and spent all her time in arranging his love-locks and decking his little person. Had Master Roy Macnaughten been heir to the throne of England, he could not have been more worshiped or looked after. His immediate presence even seemed to draw the hearts of his young father and mother closer together, for, as the child stretched out his arms toward Lady Phyllis, exclaiming, "Pretty ma-ma!" Macnaughten stretched his head also toward that of his wife, and echoing the baby's cry of "Pretty ma-ma!" kissed her on the cheek, an attention at which, for a wonder, she smiled. But the carriage was waiting for them, so, with many kisses and grasping a bunch of raisins in one hand and a candied orange in the other, Master Roy was dismissed back to his nursery.

"How he grows!" remarked Macnaughten, as he ensconced himself by the side of his wife in the satin-lined brougham; "I think the child is handsomer every time I see him."

"Yes; but you will ruin his stomach giving him those indigestible candies to eat. I've told you of it hundreds

of times ; but you men are all so selfish. Your love consists in gratifying yourselves, at whatever cost to the creature you profess to love."

"I wouldn't harm my little Roy for all the world!" said Macnaughten dubiously. Lady Phyllis seemed to have returned to her former mood, and did not speak another word until they arrived at the theater. The burlesque was screamingly funny, and the artists were in their happiest moods. Yet Lady Phyllis Macnaughten looked utterly bored, and indifferent to what was going on before her. Once or twice her husband, who really enjoyed it, turned to her for an answering laugh, and then she would force a smile and say, "Very funny; isn't it, Ronald?" and relapse again into boredom.

At last her eyes sparkled, as she caught sight of some acquaintances in the stalls.

"There are the Levisons! Don't you see them in the third row of the stalls? Do go and ask them to come up here, Ronald ; I haven't seen Mrs. Levison for an age."

"What on earth do you want to see her for—that fat, vulgar old Jewess! I should have thought that the very sight of her would have made you run a mile the other way."

"We don't think together, you see. As it happens, Mrs. Levison is one of the most amusing women I meet. She knows everybody and everything. It is quite a treat to hear her talk. Are you going to do as I ask you or not? If it is too much trouble to go downstairs for me, I will send a waiter."

"Well, wait till this act's over. Not even for that delightful creature, Mrs. Levison, can I miss this dance of Letty Lind's."

Before the act had ended, however, Ronald Macnaughten's *bête noir*, Lord Percy Sefton, had entered the box and established himself behind his cousin's chair. This little gentleman had positively nothing to recommend him except the fact of being a lord ; so he made as much of it as he could, and had consequently gained the reputation of being "a bit of a cad" among his own sex. He was but a midget of a man, standing about five feet nothing in his stockings, but he talked as if he were

six feet high. He took his success with the fair sex as a matter of course, while they used to say that it didn't signify what familiarities one allowed to Lord Percy, because he was so small. This is a common error with women, who often end by learning that small knives can cut as well as large ones. Lord Percy naturally made much of his relationship to Lady Phyllis, and many men envied him the privileges of cousinship with so beautiful a woman. Even her husband, though weary of her himself, watched the bright eyes and increased color with which she welcomed Lord Percy's advent with jealous gloom, as he tried to catch the import of their conversation.

Lady Phyllis, who had sat and gazed at the broad comedy enacting before her with solemn eyes and closed lips, now began to smile at everything, even to laugh at the jokes, and chattered as freely as she knew how. It was evidently her husband who bored her—not the burlesque nor the artists who interpreted it. So thought Ronald Macnaughten, as he retreated to the back of the box, and ceased, in his turn, to find amusement in the scene before him.

As the act ended, he addressed his wife:

"Do you wish me to give your message to Mrs. Levison now, Phyllis?"

She turned her animated face toward him. How sweet she looked when she smiled and showed her charming little white teeth!

"Oh, no, thank you! I had forgotten all about them. They would fill up the box too much. Mrs. Levison takes the place of two; doesn't she, Percy? But lend me your lorgnette for a minute, Ronald. There is such a lovely diamond necklace in the stage-box opposite. I can see it flashing like electricity from over here."

But just as she was about to adjust the glasses to suit her sight the door of their box opened to admit an intimate friend of theirs—Mr. Dalgairns, a barrister, who was also a well-known critic and journalist. He shook hands cordially with both Macnaughten and his wife, nodded to Lord Percy Sefton, and made a few remarks on the show they were witnessing.

"Wonderful little woman, Letty Lind! There'll never be another like her when she is gone. All life and movement, like an electric eel. That woman will dance in her coffin."

"What a grewsome idea!" cried Lady Phyllis. "Surely, Mr. Dalgairns, you will allow her to have a little rest then! She will want it, poor thing!"

"Do women ever require rest?" demanded Dalgairns cynically. "They are the very perfection of unrest, to my idea. Always scheming to upset themselves or somebody else. What they will arrive at, at last, the Lord who made them only knows! Have you read this new monstrosity in the shape of feminine literature, 'The Revolt of the Harem'?"

"No," replied Lady Phyllis.

"Then my advice to you is, Don't!"

"Why? Is it so bad, Mr. Dalgairns?"

"It is far worse than 'bad'; it is foully improper and indecent. We London men and women are, unfortunately, but too well acquainted with badness,—it surrounds us in every shape and form,—but reveling in indecency is an amusement which, thank God, Englishwomen have still to learn to relish! 'The Revolt of the Harem' is not clever, except in a very crude way; it is neither well constructed nor well written; it is simply indecent. For that reason it will claim many readers, but not one who will be any the better for perusing it."

"How very horrible!" said Lady Phyllis. "Who is the author?"

"A woman, of course. No man would have ventured to touch such subjects out of a medical work. She calls herself Emma Noble. I do not know if the name is assumed or not. No one does; Miss Noble being unknown to fame, excepting as having published the most disgusting novel of the season."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Lord Percy, "I must get that book."

"Do," replied Mr. Dalgairns. "It will just suit you, Lord Percy. It may not be able to teach you much, but it will doubtless recall several spicy reminiscences of your own career."

"Teach me much? Well, I should think it would be a clever book that could do that; eh, Dalgairns? I meant I should get it to laugh at. By Jove! fancy a woman having the audacity to set up to teach anything to us men!"

"Now, be careful what you say about women, Percy. Remember, I am present," exclaimed Lady Phyllis, laughing.

Her cousin stooped over her chair and whispered something in her ear. Macnaughten could not catch the words, but he saw his wife grow crimson, and guessed that it was either a compliment or an equivocal remark that had so affected her. But he had no time to do more than notice it. Dalgairns was speaking to him again.

"What utter fools women are beginning to make of themselves," he said confidentially, at the back of the box. "Not content with their clubs and their colleges, they have now begun to try and rival the men in cricketing and golfing and cycling."

"Impossible!" said Macnaughten. "No gentlewomen would attempt such things."

"I cannot answer for their being gentlewomen," replied his friend; "but I know that they attempt them. Are you acquainted with any of the members of the Pushahead Club?"

"No."

"Well, my boy, until you are, don't venture to pass an opinion on the subject. A glance into that sanctuary would make you open your eyes. I tell you that women have lost their heads. They are turning everything upside down. In a few years there will be no women left. All the sweet, soft, lovable creatures, in whom we took so great a pride, will have been swept off the face of the earth, and in their stead we shall have a race of rivals—volunteering, footballing, swearing, and drinking bipeds, who are neither 'flesh, fowl, nor good red herrin'.'"

"Well! thank God, my wife is not that sort of woman! If she were, I should get a separation from her at once!"

"No! Lady Phillis does not seem that sort, and you

may well thank God for it! Keep her as she is, man—and don't let her become acquainted with any of these she-men. They would only spoil her. This book now, of which I was speaking—which I have had the delightful task of reviewing and cutting up to the best of my ability—get it and read it if you wish to be enlightened as to what women want in these days. It is beastly—that's the only name for it—not fit for any decent woman to look at!"

By this time the burlesque was drawing to a close, and Lady Phyllis again elevated her lorgnette to have a look at the diamond necklace opposite. However many diamonds women may possess of their own, they are never tired of looking at those of someone else, in the hope, perhaps, of discovering that they are the inferior of the two. But as Lady Phyllis adjusted the glasses, and looked through them, she gave a little scream of surprise.

"It is—I am *sure* it is—Cissy Brandon, who was at school with me at Brighton. But can it be? How altered she seems! She looks older than I do, at least I think so, and she is two years younger. Do look at her, Percy"—handing the lorgnettes to her cousin—"that girl in the white dress, with an oldish man—her father, perhaps; but I believe, now I come to think of it, that her mother was a widow. What do you think of her?" glancing at Lord Percy anxiously, as if he were the oracle of Delphi itself.

"Not bad," was his lordship's verdict; "wants fattening—ought to cover up those salt cellars, you know—face, pretty, but too dark for my taste, and rather commonplace. Don't think much of her—no style," he concluded, as he put down the glasses, with an air of having wasted his time.

"Give them to me," exclaimed Lady Phyllis eagerly, "I want to look at her again to make sure. Oh, it *is* Cissy! it must be! She was such a dear little thing at school—so good-natured, and my especial chum. I long to meet her again. How can I let her know I am here, Percy? I wouldn't miss seeing her, now I have found her, for all the world."

"It's easy enough," replied his lordship. "Write a message on your playbill, and I'll take it round to her box."

"But suppose it shouldn't be Cissy, after all," suggested Lady Phillis. "I haven't seen her for nearly six years, you know! And yet, it is so exactly like her!"

"Oh, risk it!" said her cousin, with the most perfect nonchalance, "she can't be affronted, you know—must take it as a compliment. Anyway I'll find out the truth and put your mind at rest, so give me the note!"

"It's a fearful scrawl," said Lady Phyllis, laughing, as she delivered over the twisted-up morsel of playbill, "but Cissy will excuse it!" Then, as Lord Percy left the box, she looked round at her husband and saw he was alone.

"Where is Mr. Dalgairns?" she asked. "Has he gone?"

"You did not offer him much inducement to stay," replied Macnaughten, "considering that you did not address half a dozen words to him while he was here. I don't admire your taste in preferring the vapid conversation of a fool like Sefton to that of a clever man like Dalgairns."

"One doesn't come to the theater to be talked to, or *at*—which is more in Mr. Dalgairns' style—cleverly, but to see the piece. Besides, with you for a listener, he doubtless did not want to waste his cleverness on me. He doubtless did not consider me worthy of it."

"You are right, there," retorted Macnaughten. "I don't think any man could despise women more than Dalgairns does. He cannot say enough against them, for their folly and pigheadedness."

"Much obliged to him, I'm sure! I return thanks for the sex," replied his wife.

"He says, at the rate they are going on now, we shall soon have no lovable women left, and, as a natural consequence, no marriages."

"Mercy! what a loss!" cried Lady Phyllis. "Then we shall have got our own way, indeed!"

"What folly it is to talk like this! What would women do without men? They would be lost without

them—besides there *must* be marriages, or the race would end."

"I shouldn't call *that* a misfortune—at least on *our* side!" exclaimed Lady Phyllis.

"You would advise your sex, then, to relinquish all the delights of love and motherhood, for the sake of what—working for themselves and *by* themselves—instead of finding all the comforts of life provided for them?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't let's have an argument on the subject!" said Lady Phyllis peevishly. "Here is Percy come back with my message. Well, *is* it Cissy?" she continued, as her cousin re-entered the box.

"Yes, you are right; but the lady is no longer Miss Brandon, but Mrs. Bernard. The gentleman with her, who, you thought, might be her father, turns out to be her husband—Colonel Bernard. She is delighted at the prospect of meeting you again, and says that as soon as the piece is over her husband will bring her round to your box, if you will wait for her."

"Of course I will. Did you tell her my name? I suppose she knows I have been martyrized as well as herself, and am no longer Phyllis Powell?"

"Yes, I made that plain also. She's really not so bad upon a nearer inspection. Brown as a berry, but with pretty little features. I fancy I shall like her. She has a winning little way," said Lord Percy, as he attempted to pull his half inch of flaxen mustache.

The expression which Lady Phyllis had used in speaking of her marriage, "martyrized," had irritated Ronald Macnaughten's already wounded spirit. Things appear so different to us at different times. Words that we should think nothing of at ordinary moments strike us with bearing a sinister meaning at extraordinary ones. So the word, "martyrized," now fanned the flame which had been smoldering all the evening in Macnaughten's breast, and induced him to pay his wife back in her own coin of neglect.

"As your friends are coming round to see you, Phyllis, and may keep you some time," he said, "and you have your cousin to put you safely into the carriage, I will leave you in his care, as I have an appointment."

Macnaughten had slipped on his overcoat and was about to leave the box when Lady Phyllis turned round and asked him quickly :

"Where are you going?"

"Is that of any consequence to you?" he answered, smiling. "But if you particularly wish to know, I am going to smoke a pipe with Leyton."

"I might have guessed that without asking you," she returned, with something very like a sneer.

"Then it's a pity you delayed me to put an unnecessary question," he replied. "Good-night!"

"You won't see *him* till to-morrow morning," was Lord Percy's consolatory remark, as Macnaughten disappeared.

Lady Phyllis felt an unaccountable sinking at her heart as she realized that her husband would not accompany her home ; but in another minute Colonel and Mrs. Bernard tapped at the door for admittance, and she had time to think of nothing except her new-found acquaintances.

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL AND MRS. BERNARD.

CECILIA BRANDON had been a weak, frivolous, good-natured schoolgirl, and Cecilia Bernard had not altered in any particular. She was an attractive little person, with large dark eyes, a mop of curly hair, infantine features, a small rosy mouth ; and a slender figure, with tiny hands and feet. She rushed at Lady Phyllis just as she had been used to do when they met after the holidays at Brighton ; without a thought for the difference that six years might have made in her former friend's feelings for her. Lady Phyllis, however, seemed quite delighted to meet her again, while Colonel Bernard, a fine soldierly man, thirty years the senior of his wife, stood looking on with a smile that showed all his teeth.

"Oh, Phyllis !" cried Mrs. Bernard, with an effusive demonstration of affection, "I am so charmed to meet you again ! I was just saying to my husband that there was not a soul in the house whom I knew, when your cousin brought me your delightful note. Oh ! by the way, let me introduce my husband, Colonel Bernard. He has heard about you and Helen often enough, for I have told him all about the school at Brighton. By the by, how is Lady Helen, and is she married, too ?"

"No, Cissy ; none of us are married, except myself. Isn't it awful ; five of them still at home. But we must not lose sight of each other again—you will come and see me, won't you, dear ? My address is 100 Hill Street, Berkeley Square, and I am always at home on Thursdays. You will be sure to come."

"In Hill Street ; how delightful !" exclaimed Cissy ; "I wish we lived there, but we are obliged to put up with Bayswater. Such a horrid place, Phyllis ! You

would hate it as I do. The pavements are all dust in summer and all mud in winter. But we can't afford anything better. I expect you are much richer than we are."

"Come, Cissy," interposed Colonel Bernard; "you know you could not live without Whiteley's. You would have nowhere to spend your afternoons."

"What nonsense!" said Cissy sharply and a little irreverently. "I only go there because there is nothing better to do. You know how often I have asked you to live further west, but you won't take the trouble to move."

"There are other obstacles besides the trouble," replied the colonel quietly.

"But how strange that we should have met," continued his wife to Lady Phyllis, "both of us at the same theater on the same night! It is quite a coincidence."

"Well, considering we both live in London, the curious thing to me is, Cissy, that we should not have met before, in the Park, or somewhere," said Phyllis.

"Ah! but we scarcely ever go to the Park, it is so far off—quite a walk from our house to the Kensington Gardens. I don't suppose you will ever find your way to us."

"Oh, yes! I will. I promise you."

"And where is your husband, dear?" inquired Mrs. Bernard inquisitively. "I thought I saw several gentlemen in your box. Is he young and good-looking? Has he any profession? And have you been married long?"

"What a lot of questions, Cissy!" said Lady Phyllis, laughing. "You are just the same as ever. Do you remember that we always called you 'Miss Why' at school? My husband, Mr. Macnaughten, is quite young—twenty-six last birthday—and considered good-looking. But he has no profession, worse luck! A man who sits in your pocket all day, which becomes somewhat of a nuisance. What was the next question? Oh! where is he? Well, my dear, not being so gallant as the colonel, he has, what is popularly termed, 'sloped'—gone off to fulfill some engagement of his own—and left my cousin, Lord Percy Sefton, to see me safely home."

"And has that vexed you?" asked Mrs. Bernard, with the want of perspicuity peculiar to her temperament.

Lady Phyllis flushed up to her eyes.

"*Vexed me!* My dear Cissy, what an idea! Why, we've been married for four years. It would be rather funny if I could not spare him on occasions now. When you've been married as long, you'll find it rather a relief than otherwise."

"I trust not," interposed Colonel Bernard, who was one of those old-fashioned people who take everything that is said *au grand sérieux*.

"Four years!" echoed Cissy, with wide-open eyes; "it is impossible! Why, you don't look a day older than you did at Brighton."

"Indeed, it is quite possible," reiterated Lady Phyllis; "my little boy is three years old."

"A little boy, too!" ejaculated her friend, as if she had never before heard of little boys in conjunction with marriage. "How wonderful! Oh, I long to see him! When may I come and call on you, Phyllis?"

"Any day you like, dear, but you will always find me at home on Thursday afternoons. Percy, write down Mrs. Bernard's address on your cuff for me. What is it, Cissy—33 Moseley Gardens, Bayswater? I will send you a card to-morrow, so that you may not forget. And if you and Colonel Bernard would come and dine some evening with Mr. Macnaughten and myself, we shall be so very happy to see you."

"Oh, thank you, dear! You *will* go, won't you, Henry?" said Mrs. Bernard, appealing to her husband, and then, in an audible aside to Phyllis, she continued, "It is such a trouble to get him to go anywhere. He cares for nothing but his club."

"Now, Cissy, don't take away my character, or make Lady Phyllis think I am a bear," said the colonel. "I shall be only too proud to accept her kind invitation, whenever it may be proffered."

"Then that is a bargain, Colonel Bernard," replied Phyllis, smiling, "and I shall keep you to your word. And as for my dear Cissy here, I shall hope to see a great deal of her in the future."

And as she concluded Lady Phyllis kissed Mrs. Bernard again, and they all proceeded down the corridor of the theater together. At the entrance to the ladies' cloakroom Mrs. Bernard paused with a piteous look, half shame and half entreaty, on her face.

"I am afraid I must go in here for a minute, Phillis. You see we are not so fortunate as you are. We are obliged to come to the theater in a cab, and I left my wraps in here."

Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, to whom the possession of a carriage had lost all its novelty, saw nothing peculiar in what Mrs. Bernard was ashamed to confess.

"Oh, of course!" she replied, as she stopped to give her friend time to get her opera hood. "I wish I could have offered to take you and the colonel home, Cissy, but, unfortunately, I have only the night brougham this evening, and I must drop my cousin at his chambers."

"Oh, don't mention it, Phyllis," replied Mrs. Bernard, "of course we never thought of such a thing, but it is very good of you to say so."

She took her husband's arm and followed in the wake of Lady Phyllis and Lord Percy, and stood watching them at the theater door as they entered a neat, dark-colored brougham, drawn by a high-stepping bay horse, and drove away, bowing and waving their hands.

"How happy she must be!" said Cissy, with a deep-drawn sigh. "She talked of the 'night brougham,' and so I suppose she must have two or three carriages to choose from."

"Why, naturally," replied the colonel. "Her husband, Mr. Macnaughten, is one of the richest men in London. I have no doubt that Lady Phyllis has more carriages and horses in town and country than she can use. But a cab, after all, answers all the purposes, and I don't know anything pleasanter than bowling home in a hansom."

"It's all very well to talk," rejoined Cissy, pouting, "but we don't even have the luxury of a cab every day."

"Then let us make the most of it while we do," said the colonel, as he put her in a hansom and told the driver where to take them.

Meanwhile Lady Phyllis, for the short time that intervened before she deposited Lord Percy at his rooms in the Albany, could talk of nothing but the unexpected meeting with her old friend. Was Cissy not sweet? was she not *espiègle?* had she not a *je ne sais quoi* about her different from other women? She had always thought her one of the most charming, *naïve*, quaint little creatures in the world, and was quite delighted at having fallen in with her again.

Lord Percy did not wax very enthusiastic over the new "find." He did not consider that Mrs. Bernard possessed any real beauty—she was only quaint looking, as Phyllis had observed. Then, as to her *naïveté*, he would wager anything his cousin chose to lay that Mrs. Bernard knew a great deal more than she did, and as for the poor old colonel, he pitied him from the bottom of his heart.

Lady Phyllis was quite offended by his dictum.

"I shall not come to you for an opinion of my friends again," she said. "You are like all the rest of the young men nowadays—*blasé* with dissipation and dissipated company, until you have no power of discerning a good woman from a bad one. You have lost your taste for purity and innocence and refinement. If a woman has not effrontery you call her mawkish and insipid. I am disgusted with the whole lot of you."

"But, excuse me, my fair cousin, I never even hinted that Mrs. Bernard was either mawkish or insipid. I don't think she's clever, but I'm sure she's 'up to snuff.'"

"How insufferably vulgar!" remarked Lady Phyllis.

"Nevertheless, it's true. We men are seldom deceived in a woman's character. Your friend is very gushing, I allow, but—well, I don't envy the old colonel, all the same."

"Your conceit of your own opinion is beyond everything," retorted Lady Phyllis, as the brougham stopped at the entrance of Lord Percy's chambers.

"Good-night!" he called out cheerily, as he put his latchkey in the door. But she vouchsafed him no answer. The word "Home," addressed to the footman, was the only farewell he received.

As Lady Phyllis entered her own house, she passed swiftly upstairs to her bedroom.

"You need not wait up for your master. He will be late," she said to the butler, who let her in. And she dismissed her maid almost as cursorily.

"I am tired to-night, Louise. I will not stay to have my hair brushed. Give me my dressing gown and go to bed. I shall sit up and read a little."

And she flung herself upon a couch, with a volume in her hand. But as soon as Louise's footsteps had died away in the corridor, Lady Phyllis threw her book upon the floor, and turning her face round on the sofa cushions, burst into a flood of tears.

And so, half an hour afterward, her husband found her. Perturbed in spirit and with a restless anxiety upon him, for which he was unable to account, Ronald Macnaughten had thought that a smoke and talk with his old friend, Jack Leyton, might have a soothing effect upon him. Dr. Leyton, who was a clever physician, with a rapidly rising reputation, was always "Jack" to Macnaughten, who had been at college with him, though considerably his junior. Dr. Leyton's profession naturally prevented his mixing in much gayety—even such sober festivals as dinner parties being seldom within his reach—and so Macnaughten was more in the habit of visiting at the Leytons' house, than they were of returning the compliment. The doctor was now, perhaps, five or six and thirty, his wife a few years younger, and both of them giving what attention could be spared—the one from his profession, the other from her household duties—to the rearing and education of their four children.

Mrs. Leyton was the last woman in the world to give any reasonable wife a moment's uneasiness, but jealousy is never reasonable. She possessed a fine voice, which had been thoroughly cultivated, so that her singing gave great pleasure to her friends, and whenever Ronald Macnaughten was upset or disturbed (and, unfortunately, that had not been a rare occurrence of late), he always felt that Mrs. Leyton's singing soothed and calmed him, and he had been imprudent enough to say so before his wife. Hence her sarcastic remark that she need not

have asked where he was going, when he left her at the theater. Mrs. Leyton liked Lady Phyllis, but she had not made an intimate friend of her—there was almost too great a difference in their ages for intimacy. With regard to Macnaughten she felt differently. He was a deep-thinking, as well as a deep-feeling man. His mind was fitted for something higher than the engrossment of a London season, or the shooting coverts. He loved reading—not the frivolous stuff that sometimes passes by that name in these days—but such as was afforded him by Carlyle, Froude, Macaulay, or Ruskin. He did not care for poetry, calling it sentimental and mawkish—and he never opened a novel. Macnaughten liked, when he read, to feel that he had stretched the muscles of his mind, just as he liked, after exercise, to feel his limbs glowing with the exertion. His friend, Dr. Leyton, often told him that he was wasting both his capabilities and his life—that if he were wise he would read for the bar or the Church, and not let his immunity from labor spoil the chances that lay before him for reputation.

"You are capable of good, nay, great things," he would say to him, "and is the whole of your life to be wasted in going to theaters and dances and dinners, or in looking after your preserves or the breeding of your horses and dogs? When such things are a necessity, they ennoble themselves; but since there is no occasion for you to do it, why fritter away a life that was given you for higher purposes?"

On the evening in question, both Dr. Leyton and his wife saw that something was wrong with Ronald Macnaughten, but forbore to ask the reason. They suspected that the young husband and wife had an occasional jar, but were too wise to touch on so delicate a subject. So they contented themselves with remarking on the magnificent proportions of Master Roy, whom they had encountered in the Park that morning.

This opportune flattery put Macnaughten in a better frame of mind, but he was still moody and *distrait.*

"Sing me some of your charming German *Lieder*, Mrs. Leyton," he said presently, "they calm the evil spirit in

me sooner than anything else," thereby disclosing that there was an evil spirit to be calmed.

His friends were very judicious with him. They let him smoke in silence as long as he chose, and Mrs. Leyton sung him all her prettiest songs, but when he rose to return home, they did not press him to remain.

"I am afraid these young people do not always hit it off well together," said Mrs. Leyton to her husband, as the hall door closed after Macnaughten.

"Never mind. Take no notice," was the doctor's rejoinder; "no good was ever done yet by putting your finger between the fire and the wood. If their own hearts and their little child do not draw them together, nothing else will."

Macnaughten walked back to Hill Street moodily, and let himself in with his latchkey. He went up to his dressing room, with the intention of having an hour's reading before he went to rest, when he was attracted by the sound of sobbing in Lady Phyllis' bedroom, and throwing open the door, found her prostrate on the sofa, and apparently in an agony of grief. The sight hardened, instead of softening him.

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "What has come to you? Have you gone out of your mind?"

"Go away!" she returned petulantly. "I don't wish to see or speak to you. This room belongs to me. Be kind enough to leave me to myself."

The tone she adopted raised his temper.

"I shall do no such thing," he answered. "I have a right to demand the reason for this extraordinary exhibition on your part, and I shall exert my authority as your husband to remain wherever you may be, for as long a time as I choose."

Lady Phyllis turned round and sat up on the sofa, with the tear stains on her face.

"Oh, yes! *your* rights—*your* authority," she retorted, flashing defiance at him from her eyes; "if married men thought a little less of their rights and their authority, and had a little more trust and confidence in their

wives, and a little more respect for them, things would be on a happier footing than they are at present."

"Indeed! When have I failed to show respect for you?"

"You are failing to show it at this moment. What right have you, husband or no husband, to force your company upon me? Have I not said that I wish to be alone? Am I not an individual like yourself—with the privilege of my own wishes, my own feelings? Why are they to be disregarded any more than yours? If you had returned home, tired and weary, and desired to be left in peace, you would have gone to your own room and locked the door. What would you have said if I had insisted upon forcing my company upon you? Am I not a human creature like yourself, or do you look on me in the light of a table or a chair which you have purchased with your money, and have the right to sit upon?"

Macnaughten moved uneasily on his seat, but only murmured:

"Don't talk nonsense, Phyllis."

"It is not nonsense. It is the truth. Mrs. Lascelles told me only the other day that when that brute Lascelles had been storming at her all the evening, and she went up to her room and locked the door to escape from him, he followed her and prized the lock open with his tools and dragged her out again. That is a nice thing for a man, calling himself a gentleman, in a civilized country to do, isn't it?"

"Well, but I am not Mr. Lascelles."

"Perhaps not, but you're matriculating for it. You do not acknowledge that a woman is to have any likes or dislikes of her own—they are all to be guided by what *you* like or dislike—she is to be a milk-and-water copy of yourself, in fact—and submissive to you in all things. And you won't get me to be so, for one!"

"But, Phyllis, you know the Bible says——"

"Don't try to foist that stale argument on me. I was born too late. You men are very fond of quoting the Bible for the benefit of your wives—why don't you study

it sometimes on your own account? If you were ordained to rule over me you were also ordained, in the same breath, to earn your bread by the sweat of your brow, and one commandment is in about as much force to-day as the other."

"Phyllis," said Macnaughten, after a pause, "I am not so unreasonable as you imagine, and I see the justice of what you say. Your room is your own, and, as a gentleman, I had no right to force my presence upon you. I will therefore bid you good-night, and go."

But, as he rose and prepared to quit her, a sudden repentance overtook Lady Phyllis, and she began to sob again. Her emotion arrested his footsteps.

"What *is* the matter?" he redemanded. "Am *I* the cause of your distress? If so, tell me what I have done."

He resumed his seat beside the couch where she had thrown herself, and waited for a reply.

"Cannot I help you, Phyllis? Why are you crying?"

"I don't know," murmured his wife from beneath the folds of her handkerchief.

"You are incomprehensible to me. I cannot understand you. When I remember the old days and compare them with the present, I do not know if I am standing on my head or my heels. How is it possible that you can cry without knowing the reason?"

"I can feel the necessity without recognizing the reason," replied Lady Phyllis. "I only know that I am sick and weary of everything in life—that I wish I was dead and out of it all."

"You have been overdoing it—it is all the fault of the season," replied Macnaughten. "You should not go out so much. Stay more at home with your child."

"More at home with my child!" echoed Lady Phyllis contemptuously. "That is another specimen of the usual marital insult. A child, if he be but an infant, is always considered sufficiently intellectual company for the woman who brought him into the world, though the man who begets him would run five miles the other way sooner than be shut up with him for half an hour."

"Oh, come! you can't lay that sin to my charge with regard to Roy," exclaimed Macnaughten. "I may be

an execrable husband, but I'm sure I'm a good father. I'm as proud as a peacock of my little son."

"Yes; just because he happens to be a fine, strong, handsome child who reflects a certain amount of credit on yourself, and upon whom you look as a worthy successor. But if he had been a miserable, wizened little deformity, like the Lascelles' baby, you would have been glad to get out of his way."

"Do you think so?" said Macnaughten dubiously; "I don't. But, as he's such a bonny fellow, it's hard to judge. However, this is not the point we were discussing. We were talking of the reason for your despondency, and I attribute it to an overstrain. Why not run down to Sedgeley and see your sisters? Would not a few days in the country do you good?"

"Have you any particular motive for wishing to get me out of the way?" asked Lady Phyllis.

"Now, Phyllis, don't be unkind! What has come over you? Sometimes I wonder if you are the same girl who used to tremble with pleasure when she felt my arms around her."

"I don't think I am," said Lady Phyllis.

"But what has changed you? Are we not as happy as we used to be, and happier, with our little Roy to love and look after? There was a time, Phyllis, when we would have died sooner than separate voluntarily—when we had no pleasure except in each other's society. It is very sad to think that such a time should be no more. What is the reason? Have we grown tired of each other?"

Lady Phyllis knitted her brows.

"I suppose we have," she answered.

"Oh, don't say it!" cried Macnaughten, in a voice of pain.

"Well, you asked me the question, Ronald. But perhaps the feeling will pass away. I will be frank with you. There seems to have come a great monotony over my life. I cannot say what I want in it changed—but everything seems flat, stale, and unprofitable. I am so dull."

"*Dull!*" exclaimed her husband in amazement—"when you go out every night in the week, and are

receiving company all the day. You have carriages and horses at your command ; you can go where you choose, and spend as much money as you like. How *can* you be dull ?"

"Well, then, I am ! These things don't fill up the measure of my content. I feel a want here "—pressing her hand upon her breast—" which I cannot describe to you."

"Oh, this is folly ! You are overstrung, as I said before; you will get hysterical if you indulge in such fancies. You had far better go down to Sedgeley, and let the Hampshire breezes blow the cobwebs off your brain. I shall have you ill at this rate. Will you go ?"

"I will think of it," replied his wife wearily, "and let you know in the morning. But I can only go for a day or two, because of my engagements."

"A few hours will do you more good than enough," said Macnaughten, as he rose from his seat; "and now I advise you to go to bed, and get all the rest you can. Good-night."

He left the room as he spoke. Lady Phyllis would rather he had shown more disposition to stay beside her, but the time seemed past when he had been so eager for her company, and she was too proud to evince her disappointment at the change.

CHAPTER III.

LORD LISNOR'S FAMILY.

THE summer glory had fallen upon Sedgeley. The pink blossoms of the sandy heath, which encompassed the village for miles around, tinged the horizon like a Scottish moor; and the groves of pines which sheltered it from the north wind were bending under the burden of their aromatic cones. The foliage of the trees on Lord Lisnor's estate presented a beautiful kaleidoscope of color, from the deep bronze red of the copper beech and the pale green of the elms and sycamores to the olive greens and browns of the oaks, and the yellow hues of the fading lilacs and laburnams. The sandy roads were all either uphill or down dale, and fringed by bushy bracken ferns, which reared their thick fronds bravely and almost formed a hedge in themselves, for Sedgeley stood in a mountainous county, and was famous for its healthy and bracing qualities. The village depended on itself alone for popularity, for it could only boast of two or three small shops, and everything of any consequence had to be fetched from the town of Hillford, five miles away. There were no conveyances to be hired in the place, nor any lodgings to be had—there was only one church for all denominations of people who might sojourn there—and the doctor in charge of the parish lived three miles off. It might be supposed, therefore, that Sedgeley, with all its natural beauties, would not have proved an attractive residence for anyone who was not rich enough to get away from it whenever he wished to do so. Yet the village was speckled over with tiny tenements, holding at the most two or three tenants each, who all considered they attained a certain amount of respectability from living so near the residence of an earl. A man with a handle to his name is a social magnet

in England, and draws the smaller fry after him as dolphins attract the flying fish. What his lordship is about to do, or where her ladyship has gone, or what their daughters wear, serves as endless matter for discussion. It takes the place of politics, and theaters, and literature. People must have excitement of some sort in this world. Their livers won't work without it. Some take it out in dissipation—some in devotional exercises—a few in striving after the good of their neighbors—a great many in making their neighbors' lives as miserable as they know how. But all these worketh the selfsame liver. Sedgeley took it out in the form of discussing Lord Lisnor's private affairs. Not that, after all, there was very much to talk about, for the Lisnor family had never given occasion for scandal in any form. The greatest wonder about the present earl was how he contrived to keep five unmarried daughters and a maiden sister on the inadequate income which he had inherited with the title. Lord Lisnor was a man of sixty years of age and a widower. He had married an heiress, whose large fortune was entailed on her eldest son, in default of whom it returned at her death into the bosom of her own family.

The earl had never doubted, when he married her, but that she would have a son—all properly-minded women did—but this particular woman neglected her duty to that degree that, after twelve years of matrimony, she had the audacity to depart this life, leaving her husband not only without a son but with half a dozen daughters. It was a crushing blow to him, more so than the fact of her death.

He had always been a poor man—now, after having enjoyed the use of his wife's money for twelve years, he found himself poorer than ever. For, in addition to keeping and educating his six girls, he had been compelled to ask his maiden sister, Lady Catherine Powell, to take up her residence at Sedgeley Manor as chaperon to her nieces, and though the eldest, Lady Camilla, was now thirty, and quite capable of looking after herself and her sisters, Aunt Kate still remained on the premises, and was considered as one of the family.

Many people think that the possession of a title covers a multitude of sins in the shape of short commons and sparse allowances, but they judge in ignorance of the obligations entailed by aristocratic birth and the humiliation suffered by not being able to keep pace with the requirements of one's social position—a humiliation which is felt before no one so much as one's own servants, who despise the economy without realizing the cause. While other young women of their rank were presented at court, and mixed in all the gayeties natural to their time of life, the Ladies Powell had been kept down at Sedgeley, simply because their father had not the wherewithal to pay for court dresses, and a house in town, and a carriage and horses for them to prance about in. Of course there was Lady Phyllis Macnaughten—she had made a big match as far as money went, and had she possessed only one or two sisters she might have given them a chance—but what could she do with five? It was too much to expect, and so each one declined to accept her invitations, because they could not all go. It was very sisterly, but rather short-sighted. At the time we see them first, the earl was going about his farm in a suit that had already seen three seasons, and his daughters were wondering what they should do if papa did not give them new autumn dresses and mantles. Their Aunt Kate, who had a little income of her own, was very kind to them in the way of occasionally adding a cloak or a hat to their slender wardrobes, but, willing as the good soul was to do her best for her brother's children, her allowance would not go very far when divided between five nieces—to say nothing of her own requirements. Not that it really much signified what they wore in Sedgeley, but then the girls' great aim and ambition was to get out of Sedgeley. They attributed all their misfortunes to their residence in that out-of-the-way place. If papa had only elected to live in London they would all have been married long ago—so they said. They never took into consideration the fact that they had no dowries—were not more than ordinarily good looking (Lady Phyllis being the beauty of the family), and had not enjoyed many advantages in the way of education. First, a

governess at home, and then a couple of years at a boarding school to "finish off," had left them very unequal to cope with the cultivation of young ladies who had just left high school or college. Only one out of six married —and that to a commoner! It was incomprehensible—unbearable—too disheartening for anything!

So the Ladies Powell lamented, and nothing their Aunt Kate said could comfort them. They drooped like nuns incarcerated against their will, and grew thinner and more old-maidish in appearance every day. Indeed, the villagers often said that they didn't know Lady Camilla from Lady Catherine, they had grown so like each other.

Lord Lisnor was obliged to keep up some sort of appearance, in deference to his rank, but it was a very poor sort of appearance indeed, and the Ladies Powell quite dreaded the visits of their sister Lady Phyllis, lest her fine servants should carry back tales to London of the table they kept at Sedgeley Manor. They had an old landau, sorely in need of paint, with a couple of screws to drive about in, but they were very much ashamed of the turnout, and Lady Helen, who was the next youngest sister to Phyllis, preferred to rattle about the village in a pony cart with a Welsh pony, which was no better than those which the farmers' daughters round Sedgeley used for themselves. But though they went about shabbily clothed—with old gloves and hats—and though the earl sold his milk and butter and poultry—and his servants' liveries were the worse for wear—and the butcher said the Sedgeley Manor bill was the lowest in the parish for the size of the establishment—they were Lords and Ladies, and the village never forgot the fact. There is an innate adoration of a title, born with the British subject, which will never be eradicated, talk as he will! And so Lord Lisnor's family's sayings and doings formed the Blue Book of their humbler neighbors. When the telegram arrived at Sedgeley Manor, on the morning after the events described in the last chapter, to say that Lady Phyllis Macnaughten would arrive at Hillford by the five o'clock train, and to request that the carriage might be sent to meet her, considerable confusion reigned in the household, for to speak the truth the

Ladies Powell had become a little afraid of Lady Phyllis' remarks since her marriage—while she, with the insolence born of youth and familiarity, had not the least hesitation in ridiculing her father's establishment and her sisters' dresses.

"What can be the reason of Phyllis taking us so unawares?" said Lady Camilla peevishly to her aunt Kate. "She knows how inconvenient it is for us to receive her and her overbearing servants without preparation. Why could not she have given us some notice? We have nothing but a family dinner to-day, and she is sure to turn up her nose at everything on the table."

"Oh, no, dear! she is not so bad as that. She has never done more than have a little good-natured laugh at our old-fashioned ways. What have you ordered for dinner this evening?"

"Boiled beef, rabbit pie, apple fritters," replied Lady Camilla, who was the housekeeper, with a grimace.

"That is rather homely! Cannot you substitute a pair of roast fowls for the pie, and let that serve for the servants' dinner to-morrow?"

"And hear afterward that that horrid Louise of Phyllis' has declined to eat it. Phyllis' servants are a great deal worse than herself. I do wish she would not take us by storm in this inconvenient manner."

"My dear, that is not the way to speak of your sister's visits—one would think you were sorry to see her! It is quite a long time since she was here last—over three months! Have you ordered the carriage to meet the five o'clock train at Hillford?"

"Yes, and put off dinner till seven. Phyllis is sure to be fussing up in her bedroom with her beloved Louise for an hour after her arrival."

"Is she to have her old bedroom?" demanded Lady Winifred. "How she will enjoy it! She said the last time she was here that she detested the very thought of Sedgeley, and would rather starve than come back to it."

"She hasn't tried starving yet," remarked Lady Mary.

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Helen, "nor anything else disagreeable—that is, since she has been so lucky as to be married. You should see her bedroom

in Hill Street, Aunt Kate. It is like a princess's—all *guipure* lace and pale pink silk draperies, and such heavenly china! I think she told me it cost twelve guineas the set. But Ronald is perfectly crazy about Phyllis. I believe he would have her walk on velvet and eat off gold, if he had his way. What wouldn't I give to have a husband like that!"

"I wonder how she will like to use her old set," said Lady Mary spitefully; "the basin has a crack right across it. Fanny, the housemaid, took it to be riveted last week, for she said she was afraid to handle it any longer."

"We must change that," interposed Lady Catherine hastily. "Tell Fanny to put that crockery into my bedroom, Mary. Phyllis shall have my set during her stay. We mustn't let the poor child wash from a cracked basin."

"'And to whoso hath shall be given, even more than he hath,'" quoted Lady Winifred, shrugging her shoulders. "*We* have to put up with all sorts of inconveniences all the days of our life, but as soon as Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, who, as Nell observed, might feed off gold, if she elected to do so, bears down upon us, we must be stripped of our solitary comforts in order to do her honor."

By which it will be seen that a great deal of jealousy of Lady Phyllis' lucky matrimonial speculation existed among the Ladies Powell.

Only Helen, her favorite sister, stood up for her bravely.

"You're a set of sneaks—all except Aunt Kate," she exclaimed indignantly. "You wouldn't dare to talk like that to Phyllis' face. What has she done, poor darling! except marry the man of her choice. We should all have been glad enough to follow her example, if we had had the chance."

"Which we probably should have had, if we had laid ourselves out to catch anyone as she did Mr. Macnaughten," replied Lady Camilla, who was the most cross-grained of the sisters. "The way in which Phyllis used to go on with that man before their marriage was posi-

tively disgusting. I have entered a room, again and again, and found them sitting on a sofa together, with her head on his shoulder, and his arm around her—bah! It used to revolt me. There was something so terribly unmaidenly about it."

"What nonsense!" cried Helen. "What, when they were engaged! Would you have had her sit at the opposite side of the room from him? Your *fiancé* (if you ever have one, Camilla) will soon get sick of that sort of thing."

"I should certainly not sicken him with too much familiarity," replied Lady Camilla.

"Phyllis was more in love than anyone *I* have ever seen before," said Lady Winifred. "Do you remember the trouble we had with her if Mr. Macnaughten went to the North for a couple of weeks—floods of tears on parting, low spirits and pale cheeks for a week afterward, and then, bursts of hysterical joy when he returned—and no appetite from excitement. I am sure I was glad enough, for one, when the wedding came off."

"Well, it must be very nice to love and to be loved like that," said Helen thoughtfully, "and it has been such a perfectly happy marriage into the bargain. They do love each other so—and then, that sweet little love Roy! Oh, I would give everything that I possess, though that's not saying much, just to have a child like Roy."

"Helen, do think what you are saying! I'm *disgusted* with you," said Lady Camilla.

Lady Catherine foresaw a storm and thought it better to interrupt the conversation.

"Well, well, dears! we won't quarrel about that. Phyllis is a very happy girl and we should all be thankful for it. Helen, I suppose you will like to go and meet her at Hillford this afternoon?"

"Rather!" said Lady Helen. "Phyllis shall feel that there is one at least, among us, who is not too jealous of her good fortune to welcome her."

"Ridiculous!" quoth Lady Camilla, as she stalked out of the room.

"Absurd!" echoed Lady Mary. "You really should

bridle your tongue a little, Helen. I am sure *I* should be very sorry to lower myself by marrying a commoner. Pray who *is* Mr. Macnaughten? A Scotchman, whose ancestors fought with cross-bows and were clothed in untanned skins, at the time when *ours* sat on the throne of England!"

"How many of them at a time?" asked Lady Helen, laughing. "You'd have been precious glad to catch Mr. Macnaughten, with all that money, even if *he* had only been clothed in an untanned skin, Mary! You can't deny that, and nobody would believe you if you did."

"Aunt Kate," exclaimed Lady Mary, appealing to Lady Catherine, "do be good enough to make Helen hold her tongue. Her remarks are most offensive. I don't wonder at Camilla refusing to remain here to listen to them."

"Helen, my dear, pray be quiet! I think there are several things you must have to do if you intend to go into Hillford this afternoon to meet your sister. And I have a list of articles to send to Sterey's which you can bring back with you. Come with me and let us see after Phyllis' room. She did not say if she was going to bring Reynolds and Roy with her. If she does, they must take your room, and you shall share mine. We will manage to make them comfortable, never fear!"

And so Lady Catherine, the peacemaker, left the room, drawing her niece after her.

At the appointed time Lady Helen Powell was at the station of Hillford, looking out eagerly for the approaching train. As it drew up Lady Phyllis jumped out upon the platform. She was robed in a close-fitting black dress, and wore a large black hat trimmed with ostrich feathers—in her hand she carried a handbag. Nothing could have been simpler or less ostentatious than her appearance. Lady Helen looked beyond her for the appearance of Reynolds and Roy. But Lady Phyllis was alone—not even the objectionable Louise having accompanied her.

"You haven't brought Roy with you, dear?" said Lady Helen, in a tone of disappointment, as she embraced her sister, "nor Louise?"

"No, Nell! nobody but my unworthy self. Didn't I make it plain in my telegram this morning, that I was coming down for a little rest and a good blow? What should I want to bother myself with a child and nurse for? And as for Louise, I thought I would manage without her for a couple of days. It will be a novelty—and add to the effects of the change."

"But you are not looking ill," remarked her sister, as they ensconced themselves in the old landau and gave the order for "Home!"

"Neither am I ill, Nell—only tired to death with going to parties and theaters and trying to amuse other people. I have worked myself up to such a pitch that I felt as if nothing but a sight of Sedgeley and you all would do me any good, and as Ronald thought so too, *me voilà!*"

"I am so glad you should think like that," said Helen, squeezing Lady Phyllis' hand, as they drove home together. "I am sure I have missed you enough. It seems a century since you were here last, just after Christmas time. I shall never be friends with any of the others, as I am with you, Phyllis."

"And it is a shame you are not with me," rejoined her sister. "I'm sure it is not my doing. I have asked you to come up to town often enough—in fact, to take up your residence altogether with us, if it so pleased you."

"I know you have, dear, and I should have liked nothing better. But you know what papa is—as proud as Lucifer—and he will not hear of my taking up my residence under the roof of any man, however well-off he may be, unless he can offer him a *quid pro quo.* Even a visit to you in Hill Street would entail more expense than he can afford; and again he says, if either of us is to derive the advantage of an introduction by you, it should be Camilla, because she is the oldest—and I feel sure you don't want to have Camilla."

Lady Phyllis shrugged her shoulders.

"The question is, my dear Nell, what should I do with her, when I got her. I should have no hope of marrying her off. Now you, with your birth and your dear little face and ways, I feel sure would marry before the end of the season. It seems hard that I mayn't do what I can

for my favorite sister, because there are four more in the background."

"And Camilla and Winifred are getting so old—so awfully old!" said Nell. "But you don't know how shabby I am, Phyllis," she continued, in a whisper. "I couldn't appear in town as I am. I should require a complete fit-out. I wouldn't have your servants see the things I wear. I daresay theirs are better."

"I would give you a complete fit-out," replied her sister. "What is money to me? You know I have a great deal more than I know what to do with."

"It would be lovely," sighed Lady Helen, "but papa will never consent to it. He is so funny in some things. I believe he is rather proud of being poor and owing nothing to anybody but himself. He often says, 'A noble can die; but directly he becomes beholden to any other man, he ceases to be noble.'"

"That's all very fine talking," said Phyllis, "but being noble will not buy bread and cheese. I used to think grand things of my birth at one time, but I've got over all such nonsense, and consider a good balance at the banker's worth all the patents of nobility in the world. At this rate, papa will die, leaving you all old maids, with scarcely sufficient money to put bread into your mouths. I'd rather marry a thriving tradesman than encounter such a fate."

"Oh! don't let father hear you talk like that, Phyllis, or he will curse you for a degenerate daughter," cried Lady Helen, laughing. "He is very down upon you for having married a commoner sometimes. He thinks such a lot of you. He says you should have been a duchess, and would have been, had our poor mother lived to have a son. But I am sure you are happier as you are, Phyllis—aren't you, now?"

"Oh, I'm happy enough, as far as that goes," replied Lady Phyllis carelessly; "but I'm getting too old to brag about it. Nobody is really happy in this world, we all have troubles of one sort or another, and I am no exception to the rule, I suppose."

"Why, what's up now?" exclaimed her sister. "Nothing the matter with Ronald or sweet little Roy is there?

Now that I look at you, Phyllis, I fancy that you are thinner and paler than you were at Christmas time. You are not ill, dear, are you?"

"*Ill?* no! only wearied out with pleasure and gayety. I went to two dances last week, Nelly, the opera and two theaters, gave an evening and two afternoons at home, and went to an horticultural fête and a fancy bazaar. So you may fancy I had not much time to rest. Oh, by the way, whom do you imagine I met quite by accident last night at the Gaiety Theater?"

"Can't guess, I'm sure. Man or woman?"

"Both. Cissy Brandon, who was with us at Brighton, and her husband, Colonel Bernard."

"Her husband! Then is Cissy married too?" exclaimed Helen, in a tone as though she would say, "Everyone is married except myself!"

"Yes; she has been married, she told me, for more than a year. I am not sure if I quite like the look of Colonel Bernard. He is gentlemanly and all that, but much older than she is; sixty, I should say, if he is a day, and too bland and smiling to suit my taste. I hate a man who shows his teeth when he smiles. It looks so like a grinning wolf. Colonel Bernard is able, if I am not mistaken, to show another side to his character in private. But then all married men do that. No one knows them as they really are except their wives."

"And do you know Ronald?" asked Lady Helen, smiling.

"Present company are always excepted," replied Lady Phyllis evasively.

"Poor little Cissy! I hope she is happy," resumed her sister; "she was such a good-natured, timid creature. Don't you remember that if the teachers ever spoke harshly to her she invariably told a falsehood from sheer fright, and yet she would do anything if you asked her kindly. She always reminded me of one of those tiny dogs which are so loving and yet so timid that, if you strike them or speak harshly to them, they will not come near you even to take their food. How was Cissy looking? I have not heard of her for years."

"Much prettier than I thought she would be. Her complexion has cleared, and she has the curliest crop of hair. She looks older than her age, though,—you know she is only twenty,—and her eyes have rather a mournful expression in them. But she is decidedly *chic*. I should think men would like her. Percy was in my box last night and took a note over to Cissy. He didn't think her pretty at first sight, but came round to my view afterward, and said she was 'decidedly fetching.' You know his silly way of talking. Ronald can't bear him, but I feel obliged to make him welcome in Hill Street for Aunt Meliora's sake. Besides, he is someone to talk to and laugh at, and it is so dull sometimes being away from all of you."

"*Dull?*" exclaimed Lady Helen, just as Macnaughten had done. "Dull in Hill Street, in the height of the season! Oh, Phyllis, you must be joking!"

"No, I'm not. Being married is awfully dull sometimes. You can't say and do as you like, as a girl at home can, nor run about as we used to do at Sedgeley. Everything you say or do is improper, or people say so, when you're a married woman. You're not supposed to have an idea or a thought different from your husband—and then you scarcely ever see anybody else. Oh, Nell, I know what you are going to say, but I mean in a sociable, intimate way. All the people you meet at balls and dinners are not friends, they are only acquaintances, they are no good for everyday life, and after all, it is everyday life that we have to live. Men are so different. They have their clubs to go to whenever they want a change, but we have nothing. We can only sit at home and feel bored."

To Lady Helen this was such a revelation on the part of her happily married sister, that she could only sit opposite to her with eyes wide open with astonishment.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY PHYLLIS DISCOURSES ON MARRIAGE.

WHATEVER the private opinions of the Ladies Powell might be, they welcomed their married sister to Sedgeley Manor with apparent pleasure, and the earl was unfeignedly delighted to see her again. Lady Phyllis had always been his favorite daughter, chiefly because he was proud of her beauty, though he could hardly flatter himself that she owed her good looks to him. Lord Lisnor was not at all an ideal earl; not like the earls that we see on the stage or read of in novels. He was a short, spare man, with thin gray hair, which had been once red, small eyes with white lashes, like a ferret, and a scorbutic complexion.

For many years, on account of his poverty, he had neither mixed in society nor asked any guests to the Manor; all he seemed to care about was the farming of his land, the looking after his crops and harvests, the selling of his pigs and cattle to the London market.

His whole life was absorbed in these things, and his family never saw him but at meals. But as he entered the dining room that evening and caught sight of his graceful Phyllis advancing to meet him, with a bunch of roses in her belt, his face showed signs of unmistakable pleasure.

"Welcome, my dear, welcome!" he said, as he kissed her, and then held her at arm's length for better examination. "Ah! as bonny as ever, I see. Macnaughten takes good care of you, and he and I should quarrel if he didn't. Well, what's the news? Husband well? Son and heir thriving? All the papers full of Lady Phyllis Macnaughten's dress at the last drawing room, eh?"

"Yes, papa," replied Phyllis, laughing; "everything as right as it can be. Only I have been 'going it' a little

too much lately, and Ronald thought a few days of fresh air would do me good. It is awfully hot up in town; the theaters and ballrooms quite unbearable. I shall be glad when the season is over."

"And where do you and Macnaughten intend to go to when that happens?"

"Oh, to Scotland, I suppose, as usual. Ronald could not do without his grouse-shooting, but I must say I am sick of the moors. You really must let Nelly go up there with me this year, papa. I think it is the stupidest thing in the world for women to be mewed up in a shooting box while the men are out with their guns. Nothing to do, and no one to see, and though Ronald generally invites some of his friends' wives to accompany them, it is not every woman with whom I can get on. I hate the thought of it."

"But then you have the pleasure of receiving the gentlemen home to dinner in the evening, Phyllis," suggested Lady Rose.

"Oh, yes; a great pleasure!" retorted Phyllis sarcastically, "when they are so tired they can hardly drag one limb after the other, and so sleepy they can scarcely keep their eyes open. Mrs. Wyndham and I agreed, last autumn, that they were the dullest companions we had ever had. They would sit for an hour or more, after dinner, drinking wine and telling their stupid stories, and if they managed to drag themselves into the drawing room at all, it was only to make an excuse for going to bed. I should refuse to go at all, only one must order the meals for the silly creatures, who cannot do the simplest things for themselves."

The earl laughed heartily at her grumbling. He liked to watch the pouting of her pretty lips and the sparkle in her eyes.

"Well, well! my little girl," he said, "here is a dinner, at least, which you have not had the trouble to order, so come and do justice to it, if you can. Macnaughten spoils you, that's what it is, and so you're getting too fine for your work."

He laughed heartily at his own sally as he sat down to carve the boiled beef, and Lady Camilla glanced with

a pursed-up mouth at her sister Winifred, to see how the visitor would take their humble fare. But Lady Phyllis disappointed her family in one respect. She ate boiled beef with a relish, as if she were really hungry, and did ample justice to the apple fritters.

"Are all the strawberries gone yet, Nell?" she inquired, as the meal proceeded. "London strawberries don't taste like the same fruit to me. If they are not sodden, they are always half raw. Have you had plenty this season?"

"Lots!" answered Nelly. "We should have sent you some, had we not thought you must have more than you could eat."

"Anyway, I've come down here to get a fresh sensation, so I shall make a raid upon the strawberry beds this evening. I cannot stay longer than the day after to-morrow, so I must make the most of my opportunities."

"You mustn't go back to town without seeing my spring calves and foals, Phyllis," said her father. "We've had fine luck this year. Fifteen of the finest calves I've ever bred, and four splendid foals. Old Kitty is the dam of one. You remember Kitty, the black mare which we drove in harness for a while?"

"Oh, yes, papa! And is the foal black also?"

"No, it's a bright bay with a white blaze—such a beauty! Looks like a Derby winner already. What horses are you driving now, Phyllis?"

"Bays, father."

"Bays! Why, you had roans last year, hadn't you? Why did Macnaughten change them? Weren't they satisfactory?"

"I don't know," replied Lady Phyllis indifferently. "I never interfere in such matters. I suppose he had some good reason for changing them. Gave the other pair to a friend as likely as not. He is always doing some mad thing or other. You see one cannot pet carriage horses, and the stables are a long way from our house, so I really know nothing about them. I have a lovely Arab mare, which he bought for me to ride this season, but I have only mounted her three or four times. I am generally too tired, in the mornings, to ride, and I

prefer my steady old Stella. Baby has a dear little pony to carry his chair. Really it is no larger than a big dog. Ronald picked it up somewhere in Devonshire, I think. It is a miniature dray-horse. So many people stop to ask who Roy is, when he is on it."

The careless manner in which the possession of these luxuries was mentioned made Lady Phyllis' elder sisters still more jealous of the good fortune which she seemed to take so easily, and a little of which, had it fallen to their share, would have gone so far. But Lady Phyllis did not appear to notice their glances or their covert sneers. Lord Lisnor kept her engaged in conversation during dinner, and as soon as it was over he took her out into the garden and over the farm buildings to show her his own treasures, so that by ten o'clock she was thoroughly tired and quite ready to go to bed.

"I hope you will find everything that you require in your room, my dear Phyllis," remarked Lady Catherine, as she bade her niece good-night. "I have tried to make it comfortable for you, but I need not remind you that Sedgeley Manor is far behind Hill Street in luxuries of every kind."

"Oh, Aunt Kate!" exclaimed Phyllis, with a look of dismay, "I *hope* you have not been taking any trouble about me. I mean to sleep with Nelly. I came down with that idea—in fact, I won't sleep anywhere else!"

"Oh, well! my dear, if you *won't* there is nothing more to be said about it," replied Lady Catherine, with a smile, "and I am sure that Nelly will be very pleased to have you for a bedfellow once more, and will make you as comfortable as she can."

And so the two sisters went up to their room together.

Lady Phyllis unrobed herself—assumed a white dressing gown belonging to Lady Helen—let down her abundant light chestnut hair—and taking a brush and comb from her handbag, commenced to tear through the silky mass and entangle it in every direction.

"Oh, Phyllis! be careful! you will ruin your hair," cried Lady Helen. "See, what a terrible tangle you are getting it into! Let me do it for you. I don't suppose you have ever touched it yourself since you left home."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I have not. My first maid, Jennett, was an excellent hair-dresser, and Louise is still better. She understands every phase of hair-dressing, so that I have no trouble about it. It is so horribly thick—if it is pulled in the very least, I call out."

"It is beautiful," said Lady Helen, as she affectionately regarded the shining coils, "and I love to brush it for you. It is like old times, when we did everything for one another. But, Phyllis," she continued, after a while, "much as I love to have you here—and I nearly went wild with delight when your wire came this morning—I can't quite understand your coming so suddenly, without giving us any warning. We could have had things so much more comfortable for you, if we had known. There is no need to tell you that we are obliged to see after things a little when we expect a visitor."

"And that is just what I did not want you to have the trouble of doing," replied her sister. "What is good enough for you is good enough for me."

"But it must be so different from what you are accustomed to."

"Perhaps I like it all the better for that reason. Cannot you understand, Nelly, that one can have too much, even of a good thing—that life has no charm without variety—that any change (though it be for the worse) is a novelty and a distraction."

"You wouldn't talk like that if you were obliged to stay here long, and to put up with Camilla's dinners and papa's stable talk, Phyllis," replied her sister. "You would be glad enough to get back to Hill Street, then."

"I dare say. We all want just what we cannot have, in this world. I suppose it is human nature. We are very like children. Roy will throw away the handsomest toy you can give him, to cry for a hideous bronze idol off the mantelpiece."

"I don't like to hear you talk like that, Phyllis," said Lady Helen. "You used to be so delighted with your home—and—and—Ronald."

"And who says I am not?" exclaimed Lady Phyllis quickly.

"You do not speak of them as if you were. Forgive

me, dear, if I am saying too much—I have no right, I know. But it seems to me as if you were so—discontented, somehow."

Phyllis was silent for a minute and then she said:

"There is nothing to forgive, Nell. I suppose I speak as I feel. I fancy I *am* a little discontented, as you say—but it is not exactly my fault. It is the fault of marriage."

"Of marriage? Oh, Phyllis! and when you made such a happy one! Camilla and Winifred were saying only this morning that they had never seen a girl so much in love as you were with Ronald."

"I know I was—and I suppose I *am*—only, marriage has not turned out to be all that I expected. When you are going to be married, Nelly, come to me and I will tell you the history of mine. You shall not marry as I did."

"I would rather you told it to me now," said Lady Helen softly. "When I am in love with someone it may be too late."

"Well, after all, there does not seem much to tell. You know how fond I was of Ronald——"

"Oh, yes! I can remember your preventing my sleeping, from the way in which you cried all night the day he sprained his ankle and was prevented coming down to Sedgeley; and when he was obliged to go abroad with his mother, we none of us could do anything with you, the whole winter. Don't *you* remember it?"

"I was a fool, an idiot!" replied Lady Phyllis emphatically, "but I really was most awfully in love with him. If he left my presence for a minute, I thought I should never see him again—and I would have blacked his boots all my life, or scrubbed his floors, sooner than have been separated from him. I was mad—I ought to have been strangled—I didn't know what I was about."

"Then you don't feel like that now, Phyllis?" inquired her sister wistfully.

"My dear child, is it likely? Do you suppose such feelings ever last. How could the world go round if they did? No, of course they don't. I'm very fond of

him, and all that sort of thing—but the gilt is off the gingerbread."

"Oh, Phyllis!" said Nelly, in a tone of disappointment.

"It is rather difficult to explain to you, Nelly, what I mean, but we women marry blindfold. We know nothing —we take everything for granted—we are as ignorant as little children, who never even ask who pays for the bread and butter which they eat. Girls are kept shamefully in the dark with regard to everything which concerns their happiness. Now just look at me. I left home with Ronald when I was eighteen. For months afterward he literally lay at my feet! He scarcely left me for a minute —he spent all the days and nights in caressing and flattering me—calling me the most absurd names—devouring me with his eyes—lavishing everything upon me that he could purchase—swearing that my society was all he should ever desire. Well, I believed him. He is much older than myself, and had seen the world, and I thought he meant what he said."

"And didn't he?" cried Helen. "I thought Ronald was so fond of you."

"And so he is, my dear. I told you, you would never understand. We are fond of each other, but it is not the same thing—it has not been for a long time. Ronald could do very well without me now,—I mean of course for a little while,—so could I without him. And yet we are tied together not only for life, but for every hour in the day. He won't let me go anywhere without him—I mean to a theater or an evening party; he must always be there to look after me; and we drive together, and dine together, and go to church together; in fact we are *always* together."

"Oh, but that must be so nice," said Lady Helen, "to have someone who loves you to take care of you always."

"Yes, that is what women think before marriage, and so it is nice for a while. But wait till it has become monotonous—till you feel like a child of two years old, having always to ask, 'May I do this, please? May I go there? May I know that person, or accept a present from this?' Oh, it is sickening. Wait till you try it,

Nell, and then tell me if you think it nice. Why, I have not an intimate friend except my husband. I never speak to another man, except at a dinner party, or in the intervals of a dance. Ronald doesn't even like that wretched little Percy Sefton coming to the house often. He is constantly sneering about his 'sitting in my pocket' as he calls it. Last evening he left me at the Gaiety in a huff, because Percy came into our box. It is ridiculous. How is one ever to gain any knowledge of the world, of men or manners, at this rate? If your husband is a politician, you hear of nothing but politics; if a dramatist, of nothing but the stage; if a musician, of music—never mind how little you may care about such things yourself. And since Ronald is nothing but a student, and always absorbed in some stuffy old author, like Ruskin or Macaulay, why, I learn nothing at all, which makes my life, on the whole, a lively one."

"And most people would say you must lead one of the gayest and happiest lives in the world!" sighed Nelly, as she rolled round the long tresses of Lady Phyllis' hair, and pinned it into a loose knot at the back of her head.

"So it is, both gay and happy, but there is no charm in it, no interchange of thought, no healthy excitement of any kind. I often think I should have more pleasure in teaching poor children or nursing sick people, or looking after dogs and cats, than in my life. Who is the better for it? What have I to show for it? What progress do I make in anything? I am only a goods and chattel; something to be fed and provided for; that must look ornamental for the credit of my husband, just as his horses must be well groomed and caparisoned—but a nonentity, all the same—a child dependent on its guardian for both mental and bodily sustenance—not an individual, with personal feelings, and responsibilities; individual likes and dislikes; capability of judgment and power of decision."

"Have you told all this to Ronald?" asked her sister.

"I said something like it last night and there was a row, which is the principal reason I came down here in

such a hurry to-day. He called me mad and made sundry other opprobrious insinuations, and I told him to get out of my room, which I must say he did ; for Ronald *is* a gentleman, though he does not understand me. So he suggested my coming down to Sedgeley to cool myself, and if it were not for my engagements I should stay a month, just to punish him."

"Oh, Phyllis! and have you really quarreled then?" demanded Lady Helen.

"Nothing of the sort! We embraced on parting, just the same as usual. But I should like to pay my gentleman out a bit, all the same. And to-night, he is doubtless enjoying himself with his beloved Leytons."

"Who are the Leytons, dear?"

"Oh, a fusty old couple ! some of Ronald's particular friends, to whom he always flies when he is out of temper. *He* can have particular friends and visit them whenever he thinks fit, of course, though I may do nothing of the kind. Mrs. Leyton is simply *hideous*, with a nose like a crane, and no figure at all ; but she sings divinely—so Ronald says—so he goes to hear his divinity screech away his megrims. Much good may it do him," concluded lovely Lady Phyllis, with a *moue* that bespoke anything but indifference.

"But don't *you* know Mrs. Leyton, Phyllis?" said Lady Helen.

"Oh, yes ! I know her to speak to ; we have exchanged calls ; but Ronald knew them long before he did me, and says they are his best friends. *I* can't see anything in them. Dr. Leyton is a regular stick, who can talk about nothing but his old medicine bottles, and she is an awful dowdy—I never saw her in a decent dress yet ; and they have four horrible children who are always *en évidence* when one calls, lolling all over the sofas and chairs—Mrs. Leyton's ideas of a mother's duty being to live with her offspring from morning till night. I hate the whole lot of them ; but Ronald likes them, so of course he goes there whenever he feels inclined. I wonder what he would say if *I* set up some acquaintance of whom *he* did not approve, and insisted upon running off to see them whenever I chose?"

"But then you see, Phyllis, dear, he is a man——" commenced Nelly remonstratively.

"Now you are using one of the arguments of the world, Nell," interrupted Lady Phyllis. "What has the fact of his being a man to do with the matter? Why, *because* he is a man, is he to have social privileges denied to me? If you were speaking of his cycling, or football, or shooting, or any of the other amusements which are fitted only for men, I could see the sense of your argument, but not in this case. He chooses the friends who suit him best; why should I not do the same? And yet, last year, when I wanted to visit Miss Rachel Inglefield, the actress, he forbid my doing so—not on *her* account, but for fear I should meet anyone at her house of whom his royal highness might not approve. *I* was not supposed to have any power of discrimination. *I* was not considered fit to judge of whom I might, and whom I might not, admit to my own house. No, my lord and master was the only person to decide such a question, and the child of two years old was to submit. He does not treat me like a reasonable creature—no men treat their wives so; and so, if they are deceived, they have only themselves to thank for it."

"No, no, Phyllis! you would never do that!" cried Nelly hastily.

"I am not sure. The necessity has not arisen yet, but it may. I do not intend to remain a child forever, and that I can tell you. When Ronald goes to the moors this year, I should prefer to spend the time in Paris—he knows I hate Scotland—but he refuses to let me leave him. All for his own selfish pleasure! He thinks I can make the shooting box more agreeable to his friends. *My* wishes are not considered—only his own. Now, is that fair? Lord and master, indeed! I don't know about 'lord,' but 'master' fits them to a T. I teli you, Nelly, wife is another name for slave. There's nothing to choose between them."

"Oh, Phyllis, darling! you don't mean half you say," said Nelly, smiling into her sister's face. But Phyllis did not return the smile.

"Do I not? That's all you know about it, Nell.

Ronald advised me to come down here for a little fresh air, but I did it far more to have a good 'think' over these things, and then, when I return to town, I will have it out with him."

"No, no! darling, don't! Consider rather what a terrible thing it would be if you and Ronald, whom you love so dearly, really quarreled—how miserable you would be without each other—what a loss it would be to sweet little Roy if his parents were at loggerheads. Why, you both idolize Roy. What would you do if anything happened to separate you. You couldn't cut him in half, you know, and I am sure neither of you could be happy without him. And you love Ronald too much to dream of displeasing him seriously—now, confess, Phyllis, that you do," said Lady Helen playfully, as she put her hand under his sister's chin and turned the beautiful face up to her own. To her surprise, Lady Phyllis' eyes were full of tears. The sight made Nelly throw herself into her arms and kiss her vehemently.

"I knew you did—I *knew* you did!" she exclaimed, as she pressed her sister to her breast. "Why, Phyllis, if you and Ronald quarreled, after all I have heard and seen of your mutual affection, I should never have any faith in love again."

CHAPTER V.

NELL'S SECRET DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE following morning, Lady Phyllis seemed surprisingly light-hearted and gay. She ran into the breakfast room like a girl of sixteen ; chatted freely with her father and sisters ; ate with a good appetite whatever was set before her ; and declared her intention of starting in the pony cart, in company with her sister Helen, directly after breakfast, for a long day on the Barstead Rocks.

"It seems an age since I saw the lovely place," she exclaimed ; "and I have a thousand things to say to Nelly. Aunt Kate, cannot you give us a hunch of bread and cheese to take with us, and then we need not be particular about coming back in time for luncheon ? "

"Bread and cheese ! " echoed Lady Catherine. "I expect you mean *pâté de fois gras* and champagne, Phyllis ! I think anyway we can manage to let you have some cold chicken, but you must ask Camilla. She is the housekeeper, you know."

On which Lady Camilla said, with a grim smile, that she hardly thought Phyllis would care for the contents of their larder, but of course she could take what she chose ; though, for her own part, she did not see the sense of lunching on those dirty old rocks, when one might eat in comfort at home.

"Oh, you don't understand ! " replied Phyllis. "It's Nelly—not the rocks—and the lovely sense of being in the open air, far away from chairs and tables. I've been invited to two river picnics this year, but I refused both. I don't care for them when you have to dress and make a fuss. But, with Nell to talk to, it will be delightful."

Notwithstanding that they professed to despise Lady Phyllis' good fortune, and to run down the advantages

of her marriage, the Ladies Powell were very jealous of her openly expressed preference for the society of her sister Helen. They were curious to hear all about her London life ; to find out if there were any chance of their being asked to share it ; to enlighten her with respect to their own poverty ; to induce her, perhaps, to offer them assistance. But she did not give them the slightest encouragement to confide in her, she did not appeal to them for sympathy or congratulation—one might have thought, they said to each other, that Helen was the only sister she possessed ; the fact being that, in the days gone by, the four elder sisters had left the two younger ones out of everything. If there were an indulgence to be obtained, a pleasure to be had, a little extra coin to be extracted, *they* had the benefit of it, and Nelly and Phyllis had to make the best of going without. They had received the news of Lady Phyllis' marriage as an injury to themselves ; had thrown every obstacle in the way that they could think of ; had abused the bridegroom for being beneath them, the bride for having no sense of what was due to her family honor ; and Lady Phyllis had not forgotten it. She would have done anything to gain her father's consent to Helen living with her altogether, but she made no proposal with regard to any of the others.

And now, when, having obtained the little basket of cold chicken and home-made cakes she sprung lightly into the pony trap and drove away smiling, they abused her for it to their hearts' content.

"So like Phyllis!" observed Lady Winifred. "Making a parade of simplicity and ingenuousness. It was by such artifices that she caught that silly Macnaughten. But she was younger then. She forgets that those airs don't sit so well on a woman of twenty-two as on a girl of eighteen."

"And a mother into the bargain," added Lady Camilla. "If she must tear about the country in this mad fashion, why does she not bring her boy with her? He would be some sort of protection at least. Who is to know what her real motive is, in coming down here without giving us any notice, and then spending none of

her time in the house? . Miss Phyllis was rather given to pranks in her maiden days."

"And Helen would do anything she told her," chimed in Lady Mary. "They always hunted in couples before Phyllis' marriage. If she was cautioned not to mention whom they saw, or met, while driving, she would bite her tongue out before she would tell."

"Well, it's not *my* idea of how a married woman should behave," said Lady Camilla spitefully, "and if Mr. Macnaughten sanctions it, he ought to be ashamed of himself. Anyone could see that Phyllis is only making use of the Manor. She hasn't come down for the pleasure of *our* company. She had some design in it, I am certain. Perhaps her husband doesn't know that she is here at all. I don't believe any of that nonsense about his having begged her to come. She looks as well as possible—better than usual, in my opinion. I never credit half she says."

But here, at the entrance of Lady Catherine Powell, the conversation was dropped.

Meanwhile, Lady Phyllis and Lady Helen were proceeding merrily in the direction of Barstead Rocks. Though the younger sister was far the handsomer of the two, they sufficiently resembled each other to make a very pretty pair as they jogged along in the little pony cart. Lady Phyllis Macnaughten's chestnut hair, not dressed too skillfully by her sister's hands, was filling up all the interstices of her broad hat, and straying over her neck and shoulders—her limpid hazel eyes were lighted up with pleasure at the novelty of the situation—her cheeks were tinged with a soft bloom—she looked the personification of girlish health and beauty—while Lady Helen almost vied with her in charm of appearance and expression. The few villagers who met them on the unfrequented road to Barstead Rocks took glowing accounts back to Sedgeley of the way they were dressed, and the way they smiled and nodded their heads.

"And there was Lady Phyllis Macnaughten sitting by Lady Helen's side, looking more beautiful than ever," exclaimed one Sedgeley maiden who had encountered them; "and, oh, mother, they must be wearing big bows

and feathers in London now, for Lady Phyllis had the biggest hat I ever saw on her head, and *such* an enormous bow and three short black feathers, stuck straight up on end, and she smiled heavenly at me, though I don't believe she knew who I am. But Lady Helen did, for she called out, 'Well! how are you, Bessy Wakefield, and all at home?' and then was off like a dream."

The good mother, to whom Bessy related this fairy tale, thought it very strange that a great lady like Lady Phyllis Macnaughten did not bring her own carriage and horses with her when she visited Sedgeley, instead of being content to use that trumpery little cart; but she bought a couple more yards of ribbon when next she went to the draper's shop in the village, and presented herself in church the following Sunday with a bow on her bonnet which was sufficient to drive the whole congregation out of the sacred edifice.

Barstead Rocks had been a favorite haunt of Phyllis and Helen when they were girls at home together. It lay about three or four miles away from Sedgeley, and was a very solitary place. A sandy, up-hill road wound for miles along a barren gully, or ravine, which was surrounded by the black, frowning rocks which were named Barstead. No village or habitation was near them, and if one met a laden wagon crawling along the road on its way to the nearest town, it was as much as one would do. For its solitariness, as well as for a horrible crime that had been committed there, many years before, Barstead Rocks had gained a bad name, and no villager traversed its lonely thoroughfare unless business compelled him to do so. In the center of the road, but toward the edge of the deep gully, was raised a rude stone to the memory of a sailor who had been murdered there. On the rough monument was engraven: "This stone was raised to mark the spot where an unknown sailor was found brutally murdered, on the 10th of June, 1772, by two men, Aaron Twellow and William Mersey, who expiated their crime on the gallows at Lorpington, in September of the same year."

Standing by this stone one could look down into the heart of the ravine, which, though too rocky to be arable,

was rich in ivy, and ferns, and lichens of various forms and colors. As they approached the spot Lady Phyllis asked her sister to stop and let her get down.

"Let us walk along this road, Nelly, and lead old Tommy. I always thought this was the prettiest part of the ravine. How glorious the yellow broom smells, and what a lot of blue speedwell there is! I remember how this place used to make me tremble when I thought of the poor unknown sailor, returning home perhaps with his little bit of pay or prize money, and then those two brutes, Aaron Twellow and William Mersey, coming upon him in this lonely place and murdering him without a soul to help. I know once, when I had ridden out here by myself on the gray pony, and had loitered about, thinking of it all, and suddenly looked up and saw a man coming round that corner of the road on his way home, I was so frightened lest another stone might have to be erected to an unknown lady that I galloped home as hard as ever I could. And the murderer was only Ben Harris, after all."

"You were always a nervous, excitable creature, Phyllis," replied Nelly, laughing; "but this stone is enough to make an impression upon anyone. I have always thought that the poor sailor being 'unknown,' and remaining unknown, is so sad. Did they never find out who he was then? Was he of so little consequence that no one took the trouble to inquire? Had he no friends to ask why he never came home? no wife, nor child, nor parents?"

"But you must remember that the murder took place in the eighteenth century, Nelly, when crimes were not so easily tracked as now, and when this part of the country was far more lonely and unguarded than it is at present. I dare say the poor sailor was miles away from his destination. Perhaps his family did not know he was on his way home—never heard of him again and believed him to have been lost at sea. Those were not the days of railroads and electric telegraphs, of police supervision and county councils, remember. The murder of an unknown person might happen in a desolate district even to-day; how much more likely, then, a hundred years ago!"

"But it doesn't do away with the sadness of it," replied her sister ; "and remembering it makes one think of the many tragedies that happen in lowly life—that happen indeed, and are happening at this very moment, all over the world, of which one does not hear. How much sorrow is borne of which we know nothing ! How many tears are shed which we never see ! "

"Yes, you are right," said Lady Phyllis thoughtfully, "and not in the lowly classes only, Nelly. Trouble is universal. It attacks us all alike."

"How thankful we ought to be when we have no *real* trouble, Phyllis—only such as we make for ourselves."

The girls were walking along the sandy road now, leading the rough pony after them, and at her sister's words Lady Phyllis turned round smartly and asked :

"Is that meant for a hit at me, Nelly ?"

Lady Helen laughed.

"Not exactly, or at all events I did not think you would wear the cap so quickly. But I *have* been thinking since our talk last night, Phyllis, that if you knew of *my* troubles, your own would seem much smaller beside them."

"*Your* troubles ?" exclaimed Phyllis, looking Nelly full in the face. "Why, my dear child, what on earth can *you* have to trouble you ?"

"That is what each one of us says of the other, Phyllis."

"But *you* have no husband——"

"Perhaps that is the very thing which troubles me."

"Now, don't jest, Nelly ! Be serious."

"I *am* serious, dear. I didn't mean to tell you anything about it, because it is all over, and there is no remedy. But when I heard you speak of your own life, and you seemed to make so much of little restrictions and crosses, I made up my mind to tell you, if only to prove to you that there are as many disappointments in single as in married lives. Yes, Phyllis, I have experienced that awfully sentimental thing—a disappointment in love ; and if you knew the purgatory my sisters have contrived to make my life for me ever since, you would pity me."

"My poor Nelly," exclaimed Lady Phyllis, kissing her sister; "who was the man?"

"You had better let that question rest, Phyllis. I shall get no sympathy from you there. I have been in love, and I have been disappointed. Isn't that enough?"

"No, not half enough for me. I must know who he is. Do tell me!"

"Well, I warn you that it will not mend matters between us. Papa was so angry that he said the first person who mentioned his name should leave the house."

"Never mind that. Papa is not here now, and we are just the two dearest friends in all the world."

"Ah! that reassures me. Yes, darling, I will trust your love and tell you everything. It was Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott, the solicitor's son."

"Oh, Nelly!"

"I knew just what you would say; but listen a moment first. He is a gentleman, and an earl cannot be more. He came here often to transact business with papa, when old Mr. Arbuthnott was laid up with influenza, and we saw a good deal of each other. He is not a solicitor, like his father—he is a barrister, and has been called to the bar. I knew he was not what people would call a suitable match for me, but at all events he could have supported me, and we cared for each other; so I encouraged him to ask my father to let us be engaged. But, oh, Phyllis, the hurricane that ensued! It was not only papa, they were all at me—sisters and aunt together, till I wished I had never seen the man. Papa would not even listen, either to Mr. Arbuthnott or to me. He said it was the greatest insult that had ever been offered his family. He ordered Mr. Arbuthnott out of the house, and told me I might just as well have asked his permission to marry the groom. There was not an atom of sympathy with my disappointment, Phyllis, or kindly endeavor to make me see the folly of my desire—only hard, virulent abuse and contempt. The girls were almost worse in their way; for though papa did storm and rave in a most unconscionable manner for a few hours, he has dropped the subject, while they never seem to know when to let it alone. And no one has been

quite the same to me since—not papa, nor the rest. They look on me as something disreputable, I think."

"It *is* a shame," replied Lady Phyllis consolingly, "but I understand my father's obstinate refusal to your coming to town better now, Nelly. He is afraid you will meet Mr. Arbuthnott again."

"I suppose so," said her sister, in a melancholy voice. "But he need not be. Frederick—that is, Mr. Arbuthnott—is far too honorable, not to say proud, to attempt to make me do anything contrary to my father's wishes. What would be the use of it? We could not marry without papa's consent."

"Mr. Arbuthnott might rise to the Woolsack, who knows?" observed Lady Phyllis thoughtfully. "There is no saying nowadays what these clever men may not accomplish. I think papa might have let you be engaged to him, *faute de mieux*, till he saw of what he is capable."

"Oh, Phyllis, pray don't talk of him any more! There is not the least bit of hope for us, I am perfectly aware of that—and I only mentioned it to let you see that other people have their troubles as well as you, you lucky girl!"

"I understand that, and I dare say I am more lucky than I deserve. But, Nelly, no one feels where the shoe pinches but him who wears it; and things that seem mere trifles in the repetition may sting very acutely when they occur. I don't wish to depreciate a grief like yours,—it must be terrible to bear,—but the everyday worries wear one out more, after all."

"We have everyday worries, too, at Sedgeley Manor," replied Lady Helen. "If you knew what Camilla's temper has grown to, you would be astonished. Of course she is on her best behavior when you come down for a day, but if you stayed here for a few weeks, you would say it was almost unbearable. Winny and Mary have turned *dévotes*, you know—they are always at prayers together, or in church, or among the poor. It is very good of them, doubtless, but still there are so many things to be done at home that their charity might find as good a scope for. Rose professes to care for nothing but music, and so she is eternally practicing her classical sonatas on our

tinkling old piano, and I am left almost to myself. If there were only a library near at hand; or any classes for literature, or science, or even dressmaking, I might manage to fill up my time, but there is nothing to do down here—positively *nothing*—except to eat out one's heart in fruitless longings that will never be satisfied."

"My poor Nelly!" repeated Lady Phyllis. "And yet you won't let me help you by a little of that money of which I have so much more than I require."

"How would that help me, darling? How could I spend it without papa or the girls finding out that you had sent it to me. Papa, though he appears to have no eyes or ears for anything that does not concern his farmyard, is most keen-sighted about such things. If we put on a new tie or pair of gloves, he always says, 'Hullo! where did you get that from? Is it paid for? How much did it cost?' etc. And he would never forgive me for taking Mr. Macnaughten's money."

"Well, then, Nelly, let me send you some books," said Lady Phyllis; "a nice selection of the newest works, to fill your bookcase—will you? Ronald shall choose them. He knows every new book that issues from the press."

"Oh, Phyllis! it is too good of you, and I shall not refuse your kindness, you may be sure. I think some books would do more to distract my thoughts just now than anything else. But oh, how I wish I had any solid work—work that would do some good in the world, and make me feel that I was of use, instead of idling away my life in this manner!"

"That is what all women are calling out for, Nelly, and what all men are doing their best to prevent their having. They want to keep them down to be the same silly, frivolous, useless creatures forever. But it is only their selfishness, lest the women should rival them in money-making, and it will recoil on their own heads. If they will not let us do useful things, we shall take to mischievous ones—you will see that."

"Not much chance of our doing either, down in this hole," sighed Lady Helen. "Sometimes I think a tradesman's wife, who helps her husband to weigh bacon and

cheese and serve behind the counter, must have an easier, more self-satisfied conscience, than we idle, useless women of fashion."

"Just what I said yesterday, and you laughed at me for, Miss Nelly," replied her sister playfully.

"Perhaps I did, dear, but for you, it seemed such a ridiculous idea—you, with your husband and your boy, and your overplus of this world's goods——"

"And my discontent with it all, Nell," interrupted Lady Phyllis. "No! my dear, you don't get out of it that way. We are both suffering from the same disease,—dissatisfaction with life, as it is presented to us,—and we shall never be cured till we have found our proper work to do. I dare say it lies close to our hands, but our eyes cannot perceive it; so it comes to the same thing. But I would bear twice my own worries, dear, if I could relieve you of yours."

They were sitting under the shadow of one of the huge rocks eating their luncheon as they spoke thus; and as they rose to go back to the Manor, Lady Phyllis felt that she knew more of her sister's heart than she had ever done before.

She returned to London on the following day, in a much more contented frame of mind than when she had left it. She had gained an insight into the working of her girlhood's home, and it had revolted her. She felt that she could never go back to such a life—that her present one opened out possibilities of a far more extended sphere of action—of greater interests, of more liberty and freedom, more sympathy and affection. She started from Hillford station looking radiant—smiling her farewells to poor, disconsolate Lady Helen, standing on the platform, with her eyes full of unshed tears—as if she were the happiest woman in the world. And for a short space she was almost ready to confess she was so—for a short space the railway carriage seemed to be flying with her to an earthly paradise—the heaven where Ronald and her boy awaited her. But as the train drew nearer London, and the familiar landmarks appeared that she knew so well, Lady Phyllis' spirits went down to zero again, and she could only recall the unpleasant scene that had taken

place two nights before. How would her husband receive her? Would there be a repetition of their mutual reproaches? The pure air of Sedgeley seemed to be swallowed up and forgotten in the smoky atmosphere of London.

The sight of Mr. Macnaughten on the Waterloo platform dispelled her anticipations of evil, and as he came forward with a bright smile to hand her from the carriage, apparently forgetful that anything unpleasant had taken place between them, she forgot it also.

"Oh, Ronald! how good of you to come and meet me!" she exclaimed, as they entered their own carriage together. "I did not expect you. I thought you would be at your club."

"I can give up my club once in a way," he replied, "to come and meet my wife. Well, how have you enjoyed yourself? Do you feel any the better for your little trip? How did you find your father and the girls?"

His arm stole round her slender waist as he spoke, and Lady Phyllis leaned her head on his shoulder, and felt almost as if the old days had come over again, and Ronald and she were making love in the cozy corner of the Manor drawing room. She answered his questions without altering her position, and remained so until they had reached Hill Street. Then, as the door was opened, there was a scream of delight and a little figure came fluttering down the stairs to welcome her, and Lady Phyllis felt, for the moment, as if she could never again feel weary or discontented with her home life.

Master Roy was permitted as a great treat, because mamma had come back, to sit up at the table with his parents during the dinner that succeeded Lady Phyllis' return, and when the dessert was on the table she still sat with her baby on her lap, telling her husband of all that had happened during their short separation. This brought her to the subject of Lady Helen's paucity of amusement and her desire to have some more books. "May I buy her a dozen or so, Ronald?" she asked. "They would be a boon to her in that God-forsaken place! She has a real taste for reading, as you have, but with no means of gratifying it."

"Of course, you may buy her as many as you like. Why should you ask my leave?" replied Macnaughten. "Spend fifty or sixty pounds on her, if you choose; or, if it will be any help to you, I will make a list of the works which I think will please her best, and send it to Mudie's."

"Yes, that will be best!" cried Phyllis, with sparkling eyes. "Nelly will go wild with joy. She seems very dull and very solitary down there. She cannot make friends with the others as she did with me. But then who could? They are the most cross-grained set of old maids I ever saw."

"Aren't you sorry that you ever left them?" demanded Macnaughten slyly.

"Not just at this moment!" replied his wife, twitching her lips.

The time came for Master Roy to be carried off, kicking and screaming, to bed, but still his parents sat over the fruit and wine, discussing any subject that came into their heads. Presently Macnaughten remarked, "By the way, Phyllis, I'm afraid you will have to give up a certain acquaintance of yours—Lady Fearon. I've heard some queer things about her since you went away."

Lady Phyllis looked up quickly from her *marrons glacés*, as she replied;

"Lady Fearon! what on earth can you have heard about *her?* Who told you?"

"Oh! my authority is good enough—Charlie Cranmer—but it is not an *on dit*—it is a public scandal that everybody seems to know but ourselves. She was divorced from her former husband, Captain Nevil, on account of Sir Richard. He married her after the decree absolute had been passed."

"Well, what of that?"

Macnaughten, who was a man of the most rigid principles with respect to women, gazed at his wife in amazement.

"*What of that?* Did I hear you aright, Phyllis? What of a divorced woman? Why, everything that is most scandalous and disgraceful! I will not allow you to receive Lady Fearon in this house again."

"And how am I to prevent her coming here, considering that they have dined with us and we with them? Am I to go to her and say, 'Oh! I beg your pardon, but Mr. Macnaughten has heard that you were divorced before you married Sir Richard, and so, although personally and socially we considered you quite on a level with ourselves, and took pleasure in your society, I must now request that you never show your face here again, because you are not the same woman that you were before.'"

"My dear child, you do talk such nonsense when you get your 'dander up,'" replied Macnaughten. "Of course I meant no such thing. You must not insult anyone after that fashion, but you can ease her off by degrees. Don't call on her again, and, if she asks the reason (which she *won't*, I bet), plead want of time—she'll understand—and then, when the season ends, you can break with her altogether."

"But I shan't do any such thing!" exclaimed Lady Phyllis. "I like Lady Fearon, and I mean to go on receiving her. Did you ask *why* she was divorced? how her first husband treated her, to make her run away with Sir Richard? Who, by the way, is a dear and quite worth running away with. Did Mr. Charlie What's-his-name give you the particulars of the case?"

"I did not ask him for them," returned Macnaughten haughtily. "It was sufficient for me that Lady Fearon is not a fit associate for you, and so I request that you will drop her acquaintance for the future."

"Am I to drop that of Lord Charteris at the same time?" asked Lady Phyllis quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"I have heard you say that Lord Charteris was divorced from his wife because of the singer, Mme. Artini."

"Oh! that's an old story—happened in the year one."

"That makes no difference to its disgrace, Ronald. If I am to insult Lady Fearon, I shall do the same by Lord Charteris and say it is your wish."

"Phyllis, you talk like a child! You are utterly ignorant of the world's verdicts. Lord Charteris is a

man. You cannot judge him by the same standard as a woman."

"I should not. I should judge him by a far harder one: firstly, because he arrogates to himself a stronger mind as well as body; secondly, because he was the one to tempt and to betray. I should say that Lady Fearon, with her sweet ways and manners and appearance, was worth fifty of him."

"I am shocked to hear you speak in this way. Phyllis. It is not womanly—hardly decent. You are actually advocating, or appearing to advocate, the cause of a fallen woman."

"Oh, no! I am only wishful to accord her the same justice I would to a fallen man."

"*Fallen man!* Absurd! Who ever heard of such a term before?"

"Because there is no need to distinguish them, I suppose—because they are all fallen."

"Come, Phyllis, don't let us quarrel over such a trifle. You can't really care for Lady Fearon. You have not seen her a dozen times. You can give her up quite easily, if you choose to do so."

"Perhaps; but I won't give up my theory, Ronald. I won't mete out one sort of justice to a woman and another to a man. I am enough of a New Woman for that. I like Lady Fearon—so I do Lord Charteris; if I must break with one, I will with the other. But I have not decided to give up Lady Fearon. Why should I? If she *has* been divorced, what difference does it make to me? In what way is she worse than the dozens of women whom I receive and whom you have told me yourself ought to be divorced, if they are not. It strikes me the honestly divorced woman is the preferable of the two. Besides, how do I know the treatment she received that led to it? She may have been shamefully ill-used, as many wives are. She may have incurred cruelty or infidelity that would justify any woman in leaving a man—that would justify me, or anyone, in following her example."

"Phyllis, Phyllis! think of what you are saying!" cried Macnaughten, in horror.

"I do think of it," she replied, "and I will not give up the acquaintance of Lady Fearon!"

"You *will not?*" exclaimed Macnaughten, with suddenly rising temper; "but I insist upon it. I will make you!"

"Will you? How?" asked his wife.

Then he perceived his helplessness and became appealing.

"Oh, Phyllis! don't let us quarrel on the first evening of your return. Let us talk no more about it now. You will feel differently after a little reflection. You will see the reasonableness of my request. Come now! Come and sit on my knee, like a good child!"

He extended his arms to her as he spoke, and Lady Phyllis did as he requested her. Love has a great many ups and downs—a great many quarrels and condonations—before it finally breaks its bonds; and these two young people had begun their married life with a large stock of the commodity. So Phyllis sat on her handsome husband's knee and passed her fingers through his waving hair, and pressed her fair cheek against his own. And he believed that she saw the sense of his argument, though she was too proud to acknowledge herself in the wrong, and that he would have his own way in the matter by and by.

And she was steadfastly resolved, meanwhile, that if Lady Fearon was to be struck off her visiting list, Lord Charteris should be so too.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. BERNARD LEARNS HOW TO DECEIVE.

MRS. BERNARD'S house in Moseley Gardens, Bayswater, was very different from that of Lady Phyllis Macnaughten in Hill street. It was an ordinarily sized, ordinarily furnished house, standing in a quiet byroad, sheltered by a row of limes. It might, spite of its deficiencies, have looked like the home of a gentleman, had its mistress possessed a little good taste. A few graceful palms, a vase or two of summer roses, a draped picture on an easel, or a piece of embroidery thrown across the sofa, would have transformed what was commonplace into an elegant room.

But Cissy had unfortunately been bitten with the mania of the age, to rival "The House Beautiful," which apparently consists in the ideas of most women in covering every available spot with colored art muslins—crowding their walls with cheap fans placed there, one would imagine, for the sole purpose of attracting flies and dust—and filling gaudy china flower-pots with artificial foliage plants, which they fondly believe their visitors mistake for real.

There was not too much light to be seen through the rather dingy window panes, but such as there was was shrouded by thick damask curtains, supplemented by white muslin ones, so that the little drawing room was dark and gloomy even on a summer's day. But although Cissy yearned for a larger and more fashionable residence, she never dreamed of improving her present one. Her husband had married her out of the schoolroom—her mother, a widow with other children to provide for on a limited income, having thought her daughter a very fortunate girl to secure so stable a position as that of Colonel Bernard's wife. And in her satisfaction at

getting one of her encumbrances off her hands, Mrs. Brandon, like most other mothers with marriageable daughters, had never stopped to inquire into Colonel Bernard's former life and character, nor to consider if his was a temperament likely to make her foolish, weak-minded, frivolous little Cissy a happy and respectable woman. For it is the husband who makes his wife either respectable or otherwise.

Cissy, accordingly, was married and settled in Moseley Gardens—Colonel Bernard being one of those "fish out of water," a retired officer—to keep house for the remainder of her husband's life, on the inadequate pension accorded to the defenders of our country.

Now, there are no more difficult persons to get on with in domestic life than retired officers. They are the tyrants of household management—the murderers of all peace in kitchen or parlor ; it requires an old hand to deal successfully with their fads and fancies. They have so long been accustomed to exact explicit and prompt obedience from their soldiers that they expect the same from their wives and servants ; they have been compelled, under penalty of suffering for negligence themselves, to keep so sharp a lookout for crookedly sewn-on buttons, dirty swords, and slovenly assumed uniforms, that their eyes are all over the place, to detect cobwebs and dusty corners, and they have been so used to mess dinners that they cannot put up with anything under French soups and ragouts. It takes, therefore, to quote from their own vocabulary, "an old soldier" to keep them in order ; in fact, it should be a case of "diamond cut diamond." And Cissy was not sharp enough to cut anything.

Colonel Bernard was no exception to the general rule. He had never been married before. He had been a man of pleasure, and had always considered himself a great acquisition among the fair sex. He was also not a drunkard, but decidedly a hard drinker—a man who boasted that he could take any amount without its affecting his head—being ignorant the while, that in affecting his liver instead, it was driving the nails home in his coffin at the rate of two to one.

At the age of fifty the colonel committed the most foolish action of his life. He retired from the army and married little Cissy Brandon. He thought it was time he rested on his laurels and settled down; so he turned his back on the glare and the glitter of army life, on the braying of the trumpets and the beating of the drums, on the artificial pomp and importance of his position as colonel of the Martineers, and immediately sunk into nothingness and oblivion—relinquished all the joys of his mess dinners and wines, all the satisfaction of posing before the ladies as an eligible man, all the emolument arising from being a colonel on full pay, in order to become idle and insignificant for the rest of his existence.

Then his eyes fell upon innocent, ignorant Cecil Brandon, and he coveted her. It is always the way with these worn-out, dissipated, middle-aged men. They would reject the idea of marrying a middle-aged woman with scorn, but consider themselves to be quite suitable husbands for some young, unsophisticated girl, just because they are *men*, and she a woman! They think that their bloated, worn-out, and often diseased carcasses are more than a good exchange for her sweet, fresh loveliness, because they happen to have so many hundreds a year wherewith to purchase her charms. They may call the exchange by what name they choose, but the truth remains—so much money is given in barter for so much flesh; and while such a barbarous custom continues to be upheld by the Church and state of a civilized country, parsons and members of Parliament should leave off preaching and speechifying about the horrors and cruelty of slavery.

Until within the last ten years there have been no greater slaves than the married women of England, and unless they have money in their own right, or know how to make it, there are no greater slaves still. It is no refutation of the assertion to say that many among them have kind masters. So had many of the African slaves. That does not undo the fact of marriage, as it is now conducted, being a slavery from which women, under certain circumstances, have no escape but one. And the truth of this lies in the fact that, as the world progresses and women

become more enlightened, they accept that means of escape oftener than before, and will continue to do so until better and more just laws are made for their deliverance.

So, also, had the lawgivers afforded the slaves a loophole of escape would they have seized it, even at the peril of starvation. They did seize it, whenever available, at the peril of their lives.

Colonel and Mrs. Bernard, although married for little more than a year, had already found out that they had made a mistake—and he had said it openly when there was no one but his wife to hear, though Cissy was too timid to do more than weep over it in secret. She was afraid of his bold, blustering manner, and he was the sort of man who kicked a dog the more it cringed to him. He had been used to flattery and admiration from women, and he missed it now that they no longer afforded it him. This was the reason of the broad smile he wore in public—the smile which Lady Phyllis said made him look like a wolf—but which he seldom displayed in private, unless he was especially resolved to please.

A few days after Phyllis had returned to Hill Street, Mrs. Bernard was moving in a fluttering, uncertain manner about her drawing room, touching a book here or an ornament there in a restless manner peculiarly her own—an aggravating manner indeed to most people, but very indicative, to those who read aright, that she was anxious or fidgety about something. Cissy was not a girl who ever went straight to the point—she was too cowardly ; but she got her own way, all the same, without it. Although so young—only twenty—and so weak-minded, she was more rash than many courageous women, because she always trusted to make a falsehood her shield. But people who lie have generally been driven into it by intimidation. A lie is the defense of the fearful. Give a liar confidence, and he has no use for his weapon.

As she was thus occupied Colonel Bernard entered, dressed for walking, looking burly, well-satisfied, and red in the face, but without the society smile. That was

only laid aside for the moment. He had it in his pocket, like the flower in his buttonhole. He was on his way to his club, and believed that he looked irresistible.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" he asked of his wife, as if she had been a servant.

"I don't know," said Cissy hesitatingly.

"You don't know? Rubbish! When will you learn to have a mind of your own? You must decide before I leave the house."

"Oh, well, I'll—I'll take a walk in Kensington Gardens."

"With whom?" demanded the colonel.

"By myself, I suppose. I have no one to walk with."

"How often have I told you that you cannot walk by yourself? No lady does so. Do you remember that you are my wife—the wife of Colonel Bernard?"

"Oh, dear, yes; I never forget it!"

"Then you will respect it in this case, if you please, and if you wish to walk take the housemaid with you."

"Very well."

"Don't stand there saying 'very well' in that tone of voice to me! Obey what I tell you. That is the only thing you have to do."

"I have said I will obey it."

"And don't go on repeating your words in that impertinent manner. By Jove! if you don't learn how to address me properly, I'll make you."

Cissy did not answer. Her little hand, straying over the ornaments on the table, was shaking like an aspen leaf.

"Why don't you answer me?" roared the colonel; "do you want me to shake the words out of you?"

Cissy moved toward the mantel shelf and pulled the bell.

"What is that for?" demanded her husband.

"For Jane to go out with me," said Cissy.

The colonel saw he was baffled of worrying his white slave any longer, so, turning round, he banged the door behind him and went noisily downstairs.

In another minute Jane appeared to ask what her mistress wanted.

"The colonel was here," replied Cissy significantly.

"And a-worrying of you agen," said the maid, in a sympathizing tone; "it *is* a shame! What you *do* bear from him, beats me. I'm sure if I was married to a costermonger, and he served me half what the colonel do you, I'd leave him for good and all, that I would, if I had to beg my bread from door to door for it!"

Mrs. Bernard smiled in a superior manner.

"That would be foolish, Jane. We all have something to bear in this world, and it's no use trying to run away from it. But have you much to do this afternoon?"

"Lor', yes, ma'am. It's Friday, you know, the day for my fine things, and there's more than usual this week. Did you want me for anything, ma'am?"

"No, Jane; but I want a breath of fresh air, and the colonel says I must not go out in the Gardens without you. It's really unreasonable to expect you to do your work and trot about after me as well. But gentlemen know nothing about household matters."

"It strikes me as the colonel knows a deal too much," muttered the servant.

"Never mind; we must forgive him, Jane. But if he finds out that I went without you, he will be angry with me, so you won't say anything—you understand, don't you—to let him think that—that——"

"I stayed at home to do my work. Of course not, ma'am. If he asks me anything about it, I'll swear just the contrary, you may depend. What right have a gentleman to go prying about like that? And it's ridikilous to think as a married lady can't go and come in her own house, as she chooses. If the master is so partikeler, why don't he stop at home and take you himself? But there's nothing won't keep him from that blessed old club! Why, when we thought you was dying of the brownchitis, and Dr. Greenslade said as there was grave danger, the colonel went to his club every day just the same as usual, and that I can swear to."

"Never mind, Jane. You can go back to your work. I shall not be gone more than an hour. But if anything *should* happen—if he should return home unexpectedly—

you will say I went out with Mrs. Warrington, won't you?"

"Of course I will, ma'am. I'll say she called jest as we was starting, and so I stayed behind to finish my work. But, bless you, *he* won't come back before his dinner time. He's amusing himself too well for that."

I wonder, if we could only hear all our servants say of us—the terms in which they discuss our foibles, the contempt with which they mention our failings, the familiarity with which they pass comment on our appearance and manners, the acuteness with which they detect our secret sins and weaknesses—if we should ever keep one in our service. We are aware, if we have any of this world's wisdom, that our equals know as much about us as we do ourselves; but it is doubly humiliating to hear those whom we style our inferiors speak as if they held us in the supremest scorn.

Silly Cissy Bernard had shown the wisdom of the serpent in conducting these two interviews. She had not displayed any temper in answering her husband, and she had upheld his dignity before her servant. In consequence, the one had left her without the least suspicion, and the other went downstairs to say that, "Missus was ever so much too good for master, and she wondered how she could put up with him, that she did!"

And then Cissy went up to her bedroom and put on a fetching hat, and lace cape, and a pair of primrose-colored gloves, and sallied out into the Broad Walk. She sauntered up and down two or three times in an apparently aimless manner, until she caught sight of the approaching figure of a man, when she turned aside—so quietly and naturally—till she had gained the shelter of the trees, where he joined her. He was a nice-looking fellow, not handsome, but fresh in dress and appearance, and he appeared particularly pleased to meet Cissy. As soon as they were beyond the observation of the nursemaids and children crowding the Broad Walk, she held out her hand to him, and he grasped it firmly.

"So glad to see you!" he exclaimed. "I was waiting here from three o'clock to six, yesterday afternoon, in the hope of meeting you. How is it you did not come?"

"I could not possibly leave home, Captain Austin, she replied. "A cousin of Colonel Bernard's came to luncheon and stayed the whole afternoon, and I had no excuse for leaving her. It was *such* a disappointment,' continued Cissy, with a fascinating little smile.

"Why doesn't he stop at home and entertain his own cousins?" asked Captain Austin.

"Oh, he wouldn't do that! I don't believe he would miss going to his club if we were all dying. He took it into his head to-day that it was not proper for me to walk out without the housemaid. But I 'squared' her, as soon as he was out of sight. Fortunately for me, Jane has a sweetheart, and she has him in sometimes of an evening, strictly, of course, against the colonel's orders. But I never tell of her, and so, you see, she never tells of me. Dreadful, isn't it?" said Cissy, twisting up her little mouth; "but if I didn't hoodwink him a little, I should never get out at all."

"You're perfectly right," acquiesced Captain Austin. "Such a man deserves to be hoodwinked. Fancy having a wife like you and leaving her, day after day, to her own devices! He ought to be shot!"

"Well, I manage to amuse myself, don't I? But if it hadn't been for your kindness in defraying all my fees for the club, I don't know how I should ever have got in. Do you know, I can't get even my rightful pin money out of Colonel Bernard. He has always some excuse ready for not paying me. Either an unexpected bill or a loss of some kind—and yet I saw an entry in his account book the other day of three guineas for a lunch at the Holborn Isn't it a shame?"

"He's a brute!" was the emphatic rejoinder of her companion. "He was always reckoned a skinflint in the army, and none of his old brother officers speak well of him. I know several men in his corps. You get plenty of pity among them, I can tell you."

"Oh, I don't want anybody's pity," replied Cissy, pouting. "I suppose he must die some day, and then——"

"What then?" demanded the captain, looking into her eyes.

"I shall be my own mistress, and able to do as I choose," she replied.

"Let us pray it may be soon," said Captain Austin.

"I met such a dear old friend of mine the other evening," continued Cissy presently. "Oh, such a pretty woman—we were at school together—Lady Phyllis Macnaughten. If you saw her, you would never look at me again."

"You think so, do you? Is your beauty married or single?"

"Oh, married! She is one of Lord Lisnor's daughters."

"And is she coming to see you?"

"Very soon, she said. And I have received a card from her since. She is always 'At Home' on Thursdays during the season. I shall visit her soon. I believe she has a lovely house in Hill Street. You must go there, too. I shall introduce you to her."

"I would rather not. And let me caution you, Mrs. Bernard, not to be too confidential with this new-found friend of yours. Schoolgirl friendships are very different from those of married women. This lady may have altered in character since you met her last. Keep your own council—that is, unless you want to get into a scrape. That is my advice to you."

"Oh, you don't know Phyllis, or you wouldn't say so. She is the most natural, unaffected girl in the world, and would die sooner than betray a confidence. Not that I intend to tell her everything at once, of course, but—about the club, for instance, it is sure to come out sooner or later. Indeed, I have set my heart on persuading her to become a member of it."

"She will never do any such thing," replied Captain Austin. "It is not for women of birth like Lady Phyllis Macnaughten."

"Oh, excuse me, but we have several ladies of title among our members," interposed Cissy hastily. "Lady Barton is our president, you know, and on the committee we have Lady Alexander Fox and Lady Matthew Winterton."

"Lady Alexander Fox!" repeated her friend in a tone

of utter contempt. "You had better not mention her name as a bait to your intending subscribers. Why, Lady Alexander Fox is the heroine of one of the nastiest divorce cases that ever came before the public."

"Indeed, you must be mistaken!" exclaimed Cissy earnestly. "I am sure Lady Alexander has not been divorced, for Lady Barton and the committee are so very particular——"

"I know she has not been divorced, my dear child," said Captain Austin; "but she *should* have been. She only got off by the skin of her teeth. Her husband, Lord Alexander, brought five co-respondents into court against her, and the cases were well proved, only, unfortunately, he was found at the last moment to have been as bad as she was; and so neither, according to the good old laws of England, could get released from the other. But that fact does not whiten Lady Alexander, who, by all accounts, should have had fifty co-respondents instead of five. They can only have let her into the club on account of her title."

"I am surprised at that," said Cissy, in her silly way, "because she and Miss Noble are such close friends."

"Miss Noble! there's another nice woman!" cried the captain, "who writes such a filthy book about men that, for all its cleverness, proves she must have had something to do with the subject she handles so well. Some years ago—a good many, too many for a chit like you to remember—there appeared in the *Saturday Review* an article called 'The Girl of the Period.' It excited an immense deal of discussion. Infuriated mothers wrote to the papers, declaring that the satire was a base libel—that *their* daughters were not at all like the 'Girl of the Period,' and virtuous and indignant Englishwomen—the sort that refuse to believe in evil when it is right under their nose—declared that English girls were not altered in the slightest degree, and that they were as filial and innocent and simple and undesigning as ever. The writer of the article, who was afterward discovered to be one of our most distinguished authoresses, was abused all round, but she bore it with dignified indifference. What must those indignant asserters say now, if they

are yet above ground? Nothing that Mrs. Lynn Linton wrote was half so bad as the women are in the present day. She asserted that they were more fast and independent and less submissive to discipline than their mothers and grandmothers had been. What would she have written could she have foreseen their clubs and their societies, their cycling, cricketing, and golfing proclivities, their proposed volunteer corps, their diplomas of medicine, their wranglerships and honors? It may all prove that women are capable of more than we gave them credit for, but it also proves that she was right when she wrote 'The Girl of the Period,' and that women are no longer what they were."

"Well, never mind that," said Mrs. Bernard, who appeared to be a little tired of this disquisition on her sex. "Are you coming to tea with me at the club this afternoon? That is the question."

"Of course, if you will ask me. But will it not be noticeable if I accompany you there so often?"

"Oh, dear, no! We all take our 'mashes' there, whenever we like, and no one interferes with us, if we keep to the canonical hours. I have never even told your name to anyone there. Lady Alexander asked me one day who my friend was, and I told her that was my business and her impudence. None of us tell, if we have not a mind to do so. It is thought nothing of. The club was founded expressly to uphold the liberty of women."

"And it seems to act up to its principles, by Jove!" said Captain Austin.

"We have started a debating society, and meetings are to be held for the purpose once a fortnight," continued Mrs. Bernard. "The first subject is, 'What is the least motive that should justify a woman leaving her husband?' Miss Noble is for the question and Lady Matthew Winterton for the discussion. I expect it will be a very animated one. Lady Matthew is all for temporizing measures. She has a very low opinion of your sex, but believes that women were intended to be your regenerators; so should stick to you as long as ever they can. And of course Miss Noble is all the other way and says that women are far too good for men."

"Poor men!" remarked the captain, with pretended compassion. "Don't you think I am a very brave specimen of the sex to venture among such a set of clever and enlightened ladies?"

"Oh, not with me," replied Cissy with perfect ingenuousness. "They wouldn't dare say anything to you, when you go there with a member of the club."

"You reassure me," he exclaimed, laughing, "so let us proceed there at once. We can talk better in the smoking room, or the restaurant, than here."

They had sauntered near the gates by this time, and Captain Austin hailed a hansom and put Cissy into it.

"Supposing we should meet the colonel!" she said jestingly, as he took his place beside her, and the words were hardly out of her mouth before Colonel Bernard appeared in sight, walking jauntily between two ladies, on whom he was beaming with his best society smile.

"By Jove! here he comes!" cried Captain Austin, "Stoop! Mrs. Bernard, as low as you can!" and seizing her parasol, he unfurled it and held it before her face. Colonel Bernard looked up accidentally, caught sight of Captain Austin in the flying hansom, nodded his head to him, and resumed his conversation with his companions.

"By George, that was a close shave!" exclaimed the captain, as the trio passed out of sight and he ventured to put down Cissy's parasol. "I thought we were in for it, that time. He actually looked into the cab. Phew! It has made me quite warm."

"He would have killed me, if he had seen me," said Cissy, trembling.

"It is horribly risky," rejoined her companion. "Sometimes, I think, for all your pretended timidity, Mrs. Bernard, that you must be a very brave young woman. I am sure you are a very rash one."

"Are you? But what would you have me do? If my husband will not be reasonable, I must find some way by which to amuse myself. Would you have me spend my life in these stuffy little rooms, with no company but that of my servants, or an occasional old woman to look in and give me good advice? And the only alternative to be stormed at by the colonel, whenever he has had too

much to drink. It is not often he treats me to the beautiful smile he was bestowing on those two old frumps just now. He reserves that for the dear friends to whom he can pour out the story of the sad mistake he has made in marrying me."

"Do you know who they were?"

"I dared not look, but I can guess—Mrs. and Miss Nettlefold. Mrs. Nettlefold had the impertinence to attempt to give me some advice one day, but she soon left off. I never answered her a word, but sat in silence with folded hands. So she told the colonel I was obstinate and she could do nothing with me."

"And were you obstinate?"

"No, only horribly frightened. I always *am* frightened, directly anyone finds fault with me. I am only brave behind their backs."

"When you are taking me to tea at the club, for example."

"Just so. I should expect you to protect me if anything happened. But I am a fearful coward when by myself. I shake so, I cannot speak."

"Poor little woman! I wish I could be by to protect you always," said the captain sympathetically.

"I wish you could. That would be nice," replied Cissy. "I don't think, somehow, that I should ever be afraid of you."

Just then the cab stopped at the door of the Pushahead Club, which was held in a large old-fashioned house in York Place. Mrs. Bernard jumped out and ran within its sheltering portals before anyone passing could recognize her, and as soon as Captain Austin had defrayed the cab fare he followed his fair conductor into the general reception room of the club, where members were allowed to invite their gentlemen friends to take tea with them, between the hours of five and seven.

A great many women, both young and old, accompanied or alone, were occupying the reception room, lounging about the sofas, talking together, or sipping their afternoon tea. Some of them nodded carelessly as Mrs. Bernard passed them, while others simply stared at her and her companion. Having called for tea,

Cissy and Captain Austin ensconced themselves on a cozy couch at the further end of the apartment, where they kept up a running fire of small-talk.

"Do you see that tall dark woman who has just come in?" whispered Cissy. "That is Miss Mackintyre. They say the most awful things about her, that she practices black magic, and sits in the dark, with all sorts of creepy things about her. There is Dr. Adelaide Kelly. Some people think she is very clever, but I shouldn't like her to attend me. My old doctor at Bayswater told me the other day that he considered that women doctors were very cruel to their own sex, and put them to unnecessary pain—and I don't like pain," concluded Cissy.

"The men visitors look a queer lot to me," remarked Austin, "more like charlatans of some sort than gentlemen. What beastly long hair that fellow on the right hand has! and what is he doing with a velvet lounging coat on in the afternoon and in the presence of ladies?"

"Oh, that is Mr. Fortinlow, a theosophist," replied Cissy. "We have all sorts here, at times, you know. He believes in Mahatmas and precipitation, and so do the ladies sitting beside him. We have spiritualists among us, too—people who say that ghosts can appear to you—isn't it a horrible idea? One of them offered to take me to a *séance*, but I said I should die if she did. And we have lots who don't believe in anything at all, but say when we're dead we're done for, and never know anything again."

"That's the most comfortable creed, after all," replied Captain Austin, with the general carelessness of to-day. "I'm sure this life is puzzle enough, without our wanting to begin it all over again in another. Stick to that, Mrs. Bernard, and dismiss all the foolish dogmas of a hereafter. We have only one life to live and we're bound to make the best of it, for our own sake and the sake of others."

When he had allowed Mrs. Bernard to digest this great truth for a few moments, he ventured to say:

"This is very nice, of course, as far as it goes, but it is not the privacy I should like to have with you, my little friend. Why can't I take you from here to some

quiet *café*, where we could have a nice little dinner together, and go to the theater afterward."

Cissy almost shrieked :

"Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! What are you thinking of ? What would the colonel say ?"

Austin was nearly replying, "D—— the colonel!" but he restrained himself, and asked in his turn:

"Is it not possible to account for your absence in some other way ?"

"No, indeed! I have never been out in the evening without him since we were married."

" Nor he without you ?"

"Oh, yes! occasionally—to dinners and smoking concerts with his old cronies."

"Well, we must see if we cannot manage it next time he goes out himself. I dare say he is not home till late, and would give us time to have a nice little outing together."

"I shouldn't dare," whispered Cissy.

"Think over it, and it will come quite easy to you. You women are never at a loss for a good excuse. But do you know that it is half-past six ? If you are not to get a scolding to-night, I am afraid I must take you home at once."

" Oh, pray do !" cried Mrs. Bernard, in a great flurry, as she put on her gloves again. "I shall never hear the last of it if I am not in before the colonel. And tell the cab to put me down at the other end of Moseley Gardens, won't you, in case I should meet him. And if by any accident he should have reached home earlier than usual, I shall say I met Lady Phyllis Macnaughten in the Park, and she wouldn't let me leave her before."

And so, primed with deceit induced by the unjust treatment she received at her husband's hands, the little woman was taken home.

CHAPTER VII.

A SOCIETY "AT HOME."

It was a Thursday afternoon, and Lady Phyllis Macnaughten was "At home." Flowering plants and exotics lined each side of the staircase which led to the drawing room; and servants in livery were waiting in the hall to conduct the guests to the apartment, as carriage after carriage deposited its freight at the door. In the reception rooms the visitors were so closely packed that it was difficult to pass the threshold; footmen were trying to make their way among the crowd with trays of tea, coffee, and ices; at the grand piano, an Italian singer with melting black eyes, a very prominent shirt front, and fat white hands, was sighing forth some sentimental love song, with the expression of a dying duck in a thunderstorm.

Ladies were seated on every available chair and sofa, while the hapless men had to stand behind them, or to squeeze themselves flat against the wall, to the imminent danger of the valuable paintings with which it was lined. The sultry June weather made everyone feel languid and disinclined for exertion, and yet, here they were, undergoing one of the most tiring penances they could be called upon to perform. And in the name of pleasure!

Lady Phyllis was standing in the center of the room, in order to be ready to receive her guests, as, one by one, they forced their way toward her. She was looking infinitely bored and weary, but kept a fixed smile on her face the while. She was robed in some white clinging material, which showed off her graceful figure to perfection; her light chestnut hair was twisted in a classical knot at the back of her head, while it strayed in soft little curling tendrils over her fair forehead, and she

wore no ornaments except a heavy gold zone about her waist, and a coil of the same metal twisted in her hair. Visitor after visitor gathered round her, to congratulate her on her appearance, or that of her rooms, and she smiled the same on each fresh comer, and seemed equally indifferent to all. The Italian singer, Signor Cetelli, who was one of those second-rate professionals who are glad to advertise themselves by singing at the house of any well-known woman of society, had now finished his warbling, and a lady who was dying to show off was worrying Lady Phyllis to let her recite for the benefit of the company—when a diversion was caused (at least to the mistress of the house) by the entrance of Lady Fearon.

As soon as Phyllis saw her, she started forward and grasped her cordially by the hand. She had held no further discussion with her husband respecting this lady, but this was the first time since that event that she had had an opportunity of carrying out her decision with regard to her. Macnaughten was not present—like most husbands, he always avoided the house on the afternoons when his wife held her "At Homes," but absent or present made no difference to Phyllis—she was acting from inclination, as well as principle, and did not care whether he heard of it or not. Lady Fearon took her proffered hand, with a smile of pleasure. She was a tall, slender woman, with a pleasing face and very gentle manners. By the hand she held a little lad of about three years old, for bringing whom with her she immediately apologized.

"My little Dicky was so anxious to make the acquaintance of your Roy, Lady Phyllis, and teased me so to bring him, that foolishly, perhaps, I gave in to his wishes, but I sincerely hope he will not prove any inconvenience. I told him that little boys were not allowed, as a rule, to attend ladies' 'At Homes.'"

"Indeed, Dicky is very welcome," exclaimed Lady Phyllis, as she stooped down to kiss Lady Fearon's son and heir. "I will send for Roy at once to play with him. I should have known him anywhere, Lady Fearon. He is the very image of his father."

"He is considered very like," replied Lady Fearon,

with a tender smile. Old Lady Codrington, who had been notorious in her youth for her *amourettes*, and Miss Radstock who should, if everyone had their rights, have put on a wedding ring some half dozen times, looked at each other furtively, sniffed, and bent their heads together.

"Do you think she can possibly know?" said Miss Radstock to Lady Codrington.

"*Know?* Doesn't everybody in town know? But I think it is a positive insult to ask such people to meet women of reputation and family."

"So do I. And the way she refers to Sir Richard is quite indelicate, to my mind. The mention of a person like that should be dropped."

"But what can you expect, when his wife—*wife!* faugh! people who can behave in such a manner shouldn't be allowed to become wives! I really don't know what society is coming to. Her Majesty, even, who used to be so particular, seems to be getting quite lax of late. Did you read what a magnificent brooch of rubies and diamonds she presented to Mme. Ratafia the other day? A few years ago she would not have let her sing at the palace. Dear, dear! It is very sad. Things are not what they were when *I* was a girl. We were much more particular then."

"Were you *really?*" exclaimed Miss Radstock, with simulated ingenuousness. "I am sure you had need to be. Were you at the Ambassador's last night?"

"No, I was not feeling well enough to go."

"You missed something, I can tell you! The way in which young Mrs. Piercy was going on with Sir Charles Brabant was the talk of the evening. Mr. Piercy was not there, of course. I am sure they were quite half an hour alone in the conservatory, and when they came out they stood close to me, and I *distinctly* saw two or three of her hairs on his coat-sleeve. No mistaking them, you know—they're as carroty as can be, though some infatuated creatures insist they're true Titianesque. Absurd nonsense! People will say *anything* when a woman courts their admiration. I am thankful to say no one could ever say such a thing of me."

"Well ! at all events, no one has responded," chuckled old Lady Codrington, who loved a joke at the expense of anyone but herself.

Meanwhile, Lady Phyllis Macnaughten and Lady Fearon were comparing their little sons, and talking about their relative ages and capacities. While they were thus engaged, a little figure crept into the room, unknown to everyone there, and rather nervous at finding herself in so fashionable an assembly of ladies, who mostly put up their eyeglasses in the true fashionable style to examine her more closely, and did not stir one inch to admit of her gaining the side of her hostess. The footman had bawled "Mrs. Bernard," as she came up the staircase, but the young lady who had been so anxious to recite was spouting "The Charge of the Light Brigade" at the moment, and there was a general hum of conversation all over the rooms, so that the announcement did not reach Lady Phyllis' ears. After a while, however, she became conscious of a strange presence near her and a timid cough trying to attract her attention, and turning round caught sight of her old school friend. Cissy was prettily attired, but she was not dressed for a fashionable "At Home" in the height of the season. Her hat trimmed with roses, and short black lace cape, looked commonplace among the various French *confections* by which she was surrounded. The ladies who composed the assembly thought, as a rule, of nothing but their dress. From the first thing in the morning to the last thing at night, it was their chief concern. What they should wear at Lady Bolingbrook's dance, or at the boat-race, or the opera, was of greater moment to them than the care of husband and family. They half lived at their dressmaker's, who pandered to their secret vices and supplied them with anything they might find a difficulty in procuring at home, and put it down in the bill under the heading of extras. There was scarcely a woman present with a soul above shades and materials and style. Cissy was not a very estimable young person, but she was innocence personified to some of the great ladies who were crowding Phyllis' drawing rooms. When Vice or Folly is descried openly, the mob

is ready to hoot at it and pelt it with mud—but it cringes and bows before the Vice in high places, because they who practice it have more influence and money to hide or cover it up.

But as soon as Lady Phyllis became aware of the presence of Mrs. Bernard, she soon made her guests understand the estimation in which she held her, though she did wear a hat with pink roses, and a little black cape.

"My dear Cissy!" she cried, "how delighted I am to see you. You *are* a good girl to come so soon. But where is Colonel Bernard? Is he not with you? I thought he promised to come. I suppose he is like most gentlemen and fights shy of our 'At Homes.'"

"Dear Phyllis!" answered Cissy warmly, "he could not come to-day. He said he had some important businees to attend to, and I was to convey his apologies to you. I'm afraid he is like the rest, and rather afraid of finding himself in a minority."

"Ah, well, dear! *you* have come, and that is the principal thing. Have you had any tea or coffee? Or will you prefer an ice? James, bring an ice here for Mrs. Bernard. Lady Fearon, will you allow me to introduce to you a very old friend of mine. We were at school together, years ago, and were delighted to meet again the other day."

"And we had not seen each other since we were married—was it not funny?" said Cissy, in her childish way.

Lady Fearon shook hands with her new acquaintance and remarked:

"And you have both of you been married for such *a very long time* that you must, indeed, have had much to tell each other!"

"Oh, oceans!" replied Mrs. Bernard, not recognizing the playfulness of the remark, "or at least we shall have, but we have had no time for talking to each other yet—have we, Phyllis?"

"No, Cissy! and this is not the place for our confidences either"—and then she bent her head toward the young girl and said in a low tone, "Don't slip away without my speaking to you! Wait until all these

people have gone, and you and I will have a little *causerie* together."

At this hint Cissy took a seat as close to Phyllis as she could command, and waited with patience for the promised interview. The company began now gradually to disperse. Some of the ladies were going to look in at other "At Homes"—to drink one or two more cups of lukewarm tea—to eat one or two more macaroons or *marrons glacés*—to talk a little more scandal—and then to go home and declare they had no appetite, that they were sure that London disagreed with them, and that they must call in the fashionable physician of the day, and see if he did not consider that a change was absolutely necessary for them.

Others went for a turn in the Row, where their carriages got into line with the carriages of other fools like themselves, who found pleasure in crawling at a snail's pace through the Park, while they criticised the dresses of their acquaintance, and occasionally acknowledged a bow from some young ape leaning over the railings, who imagined the earth not good enough for him to walk upon, and the whole world lost in admiration of his mustaches—his drawl—his button-hole—and his new gloves. Vice, vanity, and folly! These are what make up the Great London Fair. Happy the men or women, who, having shaken themselves free of it all, resolve to live their own lives, obey their own laws, and never think once again of what the lustful, lying, slanderous world may say or think of them.

Lady Fearon was one of the last to leave Lady Phyllis' house that afternoon. The world, which was infinitely worse than herself, had lost its charm for her, and she intended to drive straight home with her little boy. But she felt interested, she hardly knew why, in Cissy's innocent-looking face—perhaps, because beneath its apparent childishness, she discerned a flippancy which, when united with ignorance, becomes dangerous. As soon as the room had become a little clear, Cissy had a better opportunity of chatting with Lady Phyllis, and in the course of conversation, the name of Mrs. Warrington came on the *tapis*. Lady Fearon looked interested at once.

"You know Mrs. Warrington?" she inquired.

"Pretty well; but she is not much my style, you know. She is quite an old woman, but she lives near us and often looks in to have a talk with me."

"*Old!*" mused Lady Fearon. "Yes, I suppose she would seem old to you, who are so young. But she is old in good works as well. I do not know a better, more generous, charitable woman than Mrs. Warrington. Do *you* know her, Lady Phyllis?"

"No. What does she do?"

"The question should rather be, what does she *not* do? Everything that is possible to succor and benefit her fellow creatures. She has a hospital for little children of the poor, which she has founded and supported entirely at her own expense. But she does not confine herself to one sort of work. She is at the service of all who really want her. She is an angel upon earth."

"She wears such a funny old cloak and a poke bonnet." remarked Mrs. Bernard, with a giggle.

"Ah, Mrs. Bernard! but they cover one of the kindest hearts in London. If we were all like Mrs. Warrington it would be the better for ourselves and the world."

"I should like to know her," remarked Lady Phyllis.

"Would you?" rejoined Lady Fearon eagerly. "Then I should be so pleased to bring you together! Will you and Mr. Macnaughten come some evening to us and meet her at dinner? Have you a vacant evening? Do think!"

Lady Phyllis did think, and remembered the difference she and Macnaughten had had respecting the woman before her, and how unlikely he was to allow her to dine at her house again. So she answered, with a heightened color:

"I am afraid we are 'full up,' Lady Fearon. Mr. Macnaughten is disposed to grumble at my engagement list already. I fear it would not be easy to find a spare evening this season. But perhaps I may happen to meet Mrs. Warrington in your company before it is over. If so, I shall be very pleased to have an introduction."

"Let us hope so. I should like you to know her.

She is a woman whose acquaintance cannot fail to do good to anyone."

At this moment a stout, fussy-looking woman advanced to Lady Phyllis, exclaiming:

"Oh, my dear Lady Phyllis! I was unfortunate enough to enter your charming house rather late, and have been quite unable to approach you until now. What an enjoyable party! What an exquisite house! You are indeed to be envied. I think you have the loveliest home in London."

Phyllis smiled languidly.

"That is indeed a large order, Mrs. Donaldson, as Mr. Macnaughten would say. But are you going?"

"I am afraid we must—it is six o'clock, you know. But I want first to introduce my friend, Miss Vipan, to you. She has been longing to make your acquaintance, so, knowing your good nature, I ventured to bring her with me this afternoon. Miss Vipan—Lady Phyllis Macnaughten."

There was something about the newcomer that repulsed Phyllis at first sight, though she could not have told you why. She gazed coldly as her name was mentioned, and then, drawing back a few paces, bowed, without any apparent notice of the hand which Miss Vipan held out. But her coldness had no effect upon the person in question, who, seizing Lady Phyllis' hand, whether she would or no, shook it warmly as she fixed her with her hard eyes, and exclaimed:

"I like you—mark my words, we shall be friends—great friends—and I am true as steel to those I love. I am very glad to have met you—but I knew I should, months ago. And we shall see a great deal of each other. Nothing in the future is hid from me."

Lady Phyllis drew back from this offensive address with evident distaste, and regarded Miss Vipan with indignant eyes that looked as though they would have liked to slay her. She was a most remarkable looking woman—you would not meet such another in a three days' march. To begin with, she was very small, and had much the appearance of a witch of the wrong sort. Her features looked as if they had been carved out of

wood; her keen eyes, surmounted by bushy gray brows, were hard as stones; her mouth was one straight line, without curve or softness about it, her gleaming white teeth were false—she was false all over ! She was attired in a dowdy fashion, without looking either venerable or poor. Her close bonnet and veil were like those of a hospital nurse, her black shawl hung over narrow, sloping shoulders, the cunning look in her eyes was enhanced by a pair of spectacles. Yet with all her apparent humility, and lack of this world's goods, Miss Vipan possessed an assurance worthy of the old gentleman himself. She never was abashed; no amount of plain speaking offended her; she had been turned out of half the houses in town, yet she managed to worm her way back again, and dare, as it were, her host to banish her for the second time. How she lived no one knew, but she managed to keep her wretched life within her body by dining at other people's expense—calling at meal time and keeping her seat, spite of hints to the contrary, until she was asked to share the meal; thrusting herself upon the notice of her rich or notable acquaintances in public, till, in order to get rid of her, they were forced to accord her the notice she worked to obtain. She was known and disliked all over town, but this was the first time she had obtruded herself upon the notice of Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, and from Phyllis' looks, it was likely to be the last. She drew herself up to her full height as Miss Vipan thus familiarly addressed her, and replied, with dignity:

"Indeed ! You have the advantage of me, Miss Vipan. The future is better known to you than to myself." And with that, she turned her attention again to Lady Fearon.

"Ah, Lady Fearon !" now exclaimed Miss Vipan. "I was not aware that you knew our friend here. How is Sir Richard ? And the children ? Well, eh ? I see you have one of them here. Come to me, Dicky, and shake hands."

But Dicky refused to do as he was bid, hiding behind his mother's skirt, and exclaimed, "Go away ! I don't like you ! You're ugly !" to Lady Fearon's dismay.

"You spoil him," said Miss Vipan familiarly. "He

would never behave like that if you brought him up properly. I want to look in upon you some evening. When will you be at home?"

"I really cannot say, for certain," replied Lady Fearon, in her gentle voice. "You see Sir Richard is very hard worked during the day, and when we have an evening at home, which is seldom, he likes to spend it alone with me."

"Oh, Darby and Joan, I suppose! Setting a good example to all the married couples in London," said Miss Vipan, in a tone of voice that brought the blood to Lady Fearon's delicate cheek. "Well, I must take my chance of finding you, and if Sir Richard wants his nap, that needn't interfere with you and me. Are you going, Mrs. Donaldson?"

"Yes, I am afraid we must be moving, Miss Vipan, for we dine at seven. Good-by, Lady Phyllis. We have had a most charming afternoon."

"Good-by," echoed Miss Vipan, thrusting out a hand with a silk glove on it, for the second time. "I see you don't half believe what I said to you just now, but it will come true—you may be sure of that. I'll try to look in again next Thursday. Good-by!"

"What an awful woman!" exclaimed Phyllis, as the two ladies disappeared. "Who is she? Where does she come from? How *dare* she speak to me as if she had known me a hundred years? And what does Mrs. Donaldson mean by bringing her here? I don't think I was ever so disgusted in my life before!"

"My dear Lady Phyllis," replied Lady Fearon, who was half disposed to laugh at the occurrence; "she is Miss Vipan—everybody in London knows her as one of the most pertinacious, impertinent, and dangerous women in town. She is nobody—she has neither family, friends, money, nor influence—and yet you meet her everywhere. I have heard people suggest that she is a private detective, but that is, of course, all nonsense, although she constitutes herself one in an amateur way. But I will tell you the secret. By hook or by crook, there is no doubt she has wormed her way into the confidence of many people; chiefly, I think, by doing dirty work for

them that no one else would perform—getting hold of their family secrets also, and thus obtaining a hold over them, which she uses for her own ends—perhaps to get money out of them ; certainly, to keep her footing in their houses. This power she uses with people like Mrs. Donaldson, who are *nouveaux riches*, and require introductions into society—which again she utilizes, as you have seen to-day, by getting them to take her to such houses as they have gained admittance to. But I am very sorry she has come here—very sorry, indeed, for she is a most dangerous woman."

"She will not have the option of proving dangerous to *me*," said Lady Phyllis proudly, "for she has seen the first and the last of me. She never enters these doors again. I think she is the most offensive creature I ever met."

"I hope you may be able to keep to your resolution, Lady Phyllis," replied Lady Fearon, rising, "but if you do, you will be cleverer than my other friends. You don't know how difficult it is to keep a person out of the house who has once obtained admittance there."

"I will *try*, anyway," said Phyllis, laughing as she bid her friend good-by. The rooms were clear by this time, and, as Lady Fearon disappeared, Phyllis turned to Mrs. Bernard and said ;

"Now, Cissy, I am going to keep you with me for the evening. Mr. Macnaughten is out somewhere on his own business and will not be home till late ; so you and I will have a cozy dinner and chat together."

Cissy looked delighted, but anxious.

"Oh, Phyllis ! if I only *dared !*"

"Only *dared !* Do you mean to say you can't do as you like in such a little thing as that ? Cannot your husband eat his dinner by himself for once in a way ? Are you *afraid* of him, Cissy ?"

"I think I am, Phyllis—just a little bit. You know I was always a coward at school."

"I remember you were, but that was different. Now you are a married woman, and have surely the right to a little liberty. Look here, dear ! If I send a wire to the colonel to say *I* want your company, and have insisted

on keeping you, and will send you home safely in the carriage by and by, won't that do?"

"Oh, I should think so, Phyllis! and I should love to stay with you so, and if he *does* scold me for it afterward, I shan't mind."

Phyllis regarded the timid girl for a minute compassionately, and then rang the bell. When the man answered it, she said:

"James, Mrs. Bernard will dine with me this evening. And bring me a telegram paper and pencil."

In a few minutes, the servant reappeared with the articles in question and Lady Phyllis wrote upon the telegram form, "I have insisted upon keeping Cissy for the evening. Will send her home in carriage," and, addressing it to Colonel Bernard, desired the servant to have it sent at once.

Then she turned to Cissy and said:

"Now you will come up to my bedroom, won't you, dear, and remove your walking things?"

Mrs. Bernard, who was still trembling at the idea of what her effrontery might bring down upon her head on her return home, followed her friend and was soon lost in admiration of the bedroom which Lady Helen had described to her aunt as fit for a princess. The costly lace—the expensive ornaments—the beautiful china and glass—the dressing table laden with silver, which Lady Phyllis regarded with the nonchalance of habit, opened out something akin to fairyland to Cissy, whose marital chamber was as bare of luxury as it well could be. But she was prevented giving vent to her admiration and surprise by the presence of Louise, who was waiting to help her mistress change her dress.

"Just give me a tea gown, Louise," said Phyllis; "I want to be comfortable to-night. Mrs. Bernard and I are going to have a *tête-à-tête* dinner together."

"Ah, indeed! miladi," replied Louise. "And Mme. Bernard too, will she that I arrange her hair or dress?"

"Oh, no, no! We want none of your fussing, Louise! We shall dine just as we are, *sans gêne.*"

"Just as miladi please," returned the well-trained Louise.

As soon as their simple toilet was completed, Phyllis and Cissy descended to the dining room to partake of a repast which appeared sumptuous in the younger woman's eyes, and then they laid themselves out for a cup of tea and a long chat in the deserted drawing room above.

"This may be said to be the first moment we have had together," observed Phyllis, as she stretched herself on a couch and Mrs. Bernard took a low seat beside her. "There is no comfort in a house like this—always surrounded by servants, all eyes and ears—it is impossible to say or do what one likes. I do so hate all this pomp and fuss. People who live in a house with four rooms and do their own cooking must be much more comfortable."

"Oh, Phyllis! I don't think you would like it," exclaimed Cissy, with open eyes. "Even in a house like ours, with only two servants, you can't imagine the trouble and annoyance I am put to sometimes. Either the cook has spoiled the dinner, or the housemaid has not dusted the drawing room properly, and the house is upset for the day in consequence. I often do such things myself, just for peace's sake—but nothing is ever right in my house—nothing."

Lady Phyllis regarded her friend thoughtfully for a while.

"My poor little Cissy," she said presently, "I'm afraid you are not as happy as you should be."

The kind, sympathizing tone brought the tears into Cissy's eyes.

"Oh! I suppose I oughtn't to say anything about it—and I wouldn't except to *you*, Phyllis, but you were always my friend when we were at Brighton together. I can remember how you stood up for me against that great bully, Emma Shortlands, and told Mrs. Brentlow that she was a liar, before the whole school. And I am sure you won't repeat what I tell you now, dear, but I am *not* happy—how can I be? The colonel is so awfully strict with me. He never takes me anywhere himself, at least, very seldom—and he won't let me go out alone; so you may imagine what a lively life I spend."

"But that is tyranny," exclaimed Phyllis boldly, "and

you are not bound to obey him. If he does not like your walking alone, he should take you out. What does he do all the day himself?"

"He doesn't come downstairs till nearly lunch time, and after that he goes to his club till dinner. And in the evenings he generally goes to sleep. Oh, it is so dull!"

"And what do you do, Cissy, while he is at his club? You do not stay in all day, surely?"

"Phyllis, I hardly dare tell you—but you will promise me, on your sacred word of honor, not to repeat it. Honor bright?"

"Honor bright, my dear child! Did I ever betray one of your confidences yet? Why should you doubt me now?"

"I don't, but this is an awful secret. If my husband knew it, I believe he would kill me. And all my pleasure would be gone too. So you will promise, won't you?"

"Sacredly!" repeated Phyllis. "Why, darling, do you think I would be such a brute as to get you into a scrape. I would much rather get into one myself, Cissy."

"Ah! but you have no fear of that. Mr. Macnaughten is not like Colonel Bernard. He can't be. Well, I *will* trust you, dear, for I know you of old. You asked me just now what I did while my husband goes to his club. Why, I go to mine."

Lady Phyllis turned round on her couch and gazed at her friend in amazement. She had never heard of such a thing before.

"Cissy, what are you talking of? Are you joking? What do you mean? How can you go to a club, you silly little thing?"

"I mean what I say, Phyllis, but don't talk so loud, lest Mr. Macnaughten should come in unexpectedly. I go to my club—the Pushahead—only I have never dared to tell Colonel Bernard about it. Don't you know that ladies have clubs now?"

"I never heard of such a thing. What sort of clubs?"

"Why! just the same as gentlemen's clubs—with reading rooms and all that. There are several in London now. They were instituted to give women more liberty, and to further all movements for their good.

The members mostly think that women are very hardly used by men—husbands chiefly—and they have banded together to protect them from tyranny. There are all sorts of ladies there—literary, and social, and artistic—and they can meet at any time, and take their friends also. The only happy moments I have are spent at the Pushahead."

Lady Phyllis' eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"It must be a glorious institution," she said. "I am so glad you have told me of it. I didn't know there was such a place. Oh! how many women I know that such a club might benefit, like poor Mrs. Lascelles, whose husband treats her like a brute when he is tipsy—and Mrs. Tritton, who is so poor she can never afford to go to theaters or any places of pleasure. What a boon a club would be to them! And they must be high-minded women too, who uphold it. Have you a president and committee?"

"Oh, dear, yes! everything in regular order. Lady Barton is our president, and we have a committee of twenty ladies. Our vice president was Miss Moberley, the African traveler, but she is just dead, so the post is vacant."

Lady Phyllis sprang from her couch and commenced to pace up and down the room.

"What a grand idea!" she exclaimed; "what a grand, noble ideal! Women banded together to defend the interests of their own sex; to uphold their rights of liberty of thought and action—free women standing back to back, as it were, to allow the egress of the imprisoned slaves. For that is what it amounts to, Cissy. However kind and indulgent our husbands may be; so long as they treat us like children under control, as irresponsible creatures, who are not fitted to think and judge for ourselves—we are slaves, to all intents and purposes, and I have always said so. But the notion of this club—what did you call it?—the Pushahead—excites me beyond measure. It is just the sort of thing I have dreamed of—a place where women may meet to discuss any measures that may be agitating for their own benefit—where one may hear and have communion with the cleverest

feminine brains of the day. For I suppose the members are all clever, Cissy."

"Not all, Phyllis, or they wouldn't have admitted me," replied Cissy humbly. "But there are a great number of clever women there, no doubt—authoresses, lecturers, painters, and singers. Political ladies too, and doctors, and Girton scholars. I am sometimes half afraid to go among them. Miss Emma Noble is one of the committee, the author of 'The Revolt of the Harem.' You must have heard of that book—it is such a remarkable one."

Lady Phyllis knitted her brows.

"Yes, I *have* heard of it; but it was not spoken of very nicely. Mr. Dalgairns, the critic, warned me not to read it. Have *you* read it, Cissy?"

"Oh, dear, yes! Everyone has. But of course the critics are all down upon it, because it is so clever and outspoken, and shows what wretches men are, and how unfit to have charge of innocent girls. Everybody has been speaking of it. They say it is the most remarkable book that has ever been written by a woman. That is, the women say so. The men abuse it because it shows them up. Don't you understand, Phyllis?"

"Certainly I do, and I shall send for it from Mudie's at once. I have only thought of it hitherto as an unseemly book to be written by a woman, but you have put the matter in entirely a new light. If it was written with a view to benefit her sex, Miss Noble is what her name implies—a noble woman—and it little signifies if her story is outspoken or not, if it accomplishes the good she intended. She must love and sympathize with her own sex, to incur the risk of obloquy for their sake. She must be a large-hearted, gossip-defying woman; one to go to in any trouble from marriage or men, with the assurance of finding protection and defense."

"Yes, I suppose so!" acquiesced Mrs. Bernard, rather hesitatingly, "though she doesn't seem like that in private life. She is rather a hard-looking woman—with pronounced features and a bony figure—a harsh voice, too, which generally makes me jump. She is given to coming down upon you suddenly with some awkward question,

answering it for herself if you hesitate to do so. But she is thought a great power in the club—it is always 'Miss Noble thinks this' or 'Miss Noble says that.' However, I suppose it is all right, and she is really too clever to have time to think of such little amenities. But I must say she frightens me sometimes."

"My dear Cissy," said Phyllis, with a deprecating smile, "you are so easily frightened. You see a bogey in every bush. Depend upon it that you are mistaken. A woman like Miss Noble, who can have had but one motive in writing so unpleasant a book, would never be anything but kind and helpful to a woman, whether her troubles were large or small. She would only be too ready and pleased to put her theories into practice; at least, that is my idea."

"Perhaps you are right" said Cissy. "But, of course I know very little about Miss Noble, or indeed any of the committee. That is the best of the club—you are so perfectly free there. Each one can do exactly as she likes."

"You must take me there as soon as you can," exclaimed Lady Phyllis. "I am dying to see it! Will there be any difficulty in getting in?"

"For you—as a member, do you mean? Oh, Phyllis! they'll jump out of their skins to get you. They dearly love a title."

Lady Phyllis' face fell.

"Love a title!" she echoed. "But I thought they were mostly women of genius. What difference can an empty title make to them or their club, when it has been instituted to befriend their sex of whatever rank or grade?"

"Oh, I don't know!" replied her companion, "unless they fancy it adds importance to their list of members. I always think they make a great fuss over Lady Alexander Fox and Lady Matthew Winterton. But I am sure our president, Lady Barton, will be delighted to have you."

"Well! when can you go with me and introduce me to her?" asked Phyllis eagerly. "Will to-morrow afternoon be convenient for you? If so, I will call for you about four o'clock, and we can go together."

Mrs. Bernard looked dubious.

"Of course it will be convenient for *me*, Phyllis—the question is whether the colonel will let me go. Sometimes he takes it into his head to go out with me, or to keep me at home—and you must not forget that he knows nothing of my being a member of the Pushahead."

"How did you manage about the fees then, Cissy? Since Colonel Bernard is so particular about such matters, didn't he ever ask where the money had gone to?"

Cissy blushed scarlet.

"He *would* have done so at once, Phyllis, only—only—a friend of mine was kind enough to pay the entrance and annual fees for me."

Lady Phyllis was quite unsuspicious.

"That *was* kind of her," she replied, "but I would have done just the same twice over. Mind, Cissy, dear! if ever you are short of money, to come to me. You mustn't be silly and proud about it, for it is no self-denial on my part. Just tell me what you want, dear, and you shall always have it and no questions asked."

"Oh, Phyllis! what a dear, kind friend you are to me! How glad I am that we have met again! But I have been thinking that if you were to write a note to my husband, asking him to let me drive with you to-morrow afternoon, that he might consent without asking any questions."

"Of course I will," replied Lady Phyllis, and then she stopped and regarded Mrs. Bernard with eyes full of compassion. "What a shame it is," she continued, "that you should be afraid of him like this! What is the reason? Tell me the truth, Cissy. Does he strike you?"

"Oh, no, no! He has never done that—but he talks so loudly, and swears so much, it frightens me. And then he never makes any allowances for my inexperience. He expects me to know all about housekeeping, as if I were as old as my mother. And the money is so little—and—and altogether I am so lonely and so dull," concluded Cissy, in a faltering voice.

"Why did you ever marry him, Cissy? He must he double your age."

"More than that; he was fifty last birthday. Why

did I marry him? Oh, I don't know. I was *talked* into it. You see there are so many of us at home—five, with myself—and mother is a widow and hardly knows how to make ends meet; so when Colonel Bernard proposed for me she said it was a chance I should never get again—which, perhaps, is true—and I owed it to my family to accept his offer. I never cared for him, Phyllis; I didn't know what marriage meant; I had never seen any man to compare him with, and, naturally, he was very sweet and kind to me then. So I thought it would be a good thing for me, that I should be a great lady, which I find I am not, and so I married him. I wish I had been dead first!" said Cissy vehemently, "for—for—I *hate* him, Phyllis!"

"My poor child! Well, that is not the history of *my* marriage, for I was so desperately in love with my husband that I could neither eat nor sleep for dreaming of the time when I should be his altogether. And yet I do not think my lot is much more to be envied than your own. I can guess what you are going to say, Cissy—that I have everything that money can procure me; but these things do not bring happiness, my dear, though I dare say it is inconvenient to be without them; they do not make one more contented with life. I dare say you will be surprised to hear that I am a very discontented woman; that though there is nothing different in Ronald from the day we married that I can see, and I have a dear little boy, of whom I am very fond, yet I am not happy, and I cannot tell you why. I seem sick of everything; the monotony of my existence distracts me; I have friends and amusements, dress, dinners, and dances, but yet I am not contented, and I do not believe that the feeling arises, as Mr. Macnaughten says it does, because I have too much in this world and am like a spoiled child. I do not want what he calls 'too much.' I would part with it all to have something more solid and satisfying, to feel that I was of importance in the world—to be, in fact, an individual and not a toy."

"Can't *you*, then, do as you like?" demanded Cissy, with amazement.

"I am not kept a prisoner as you are, Cissy, but still

my life is carved out for me and I am not my own mistress. I can drive where I choose and call on whom I choose (always supposing that it is someone of whom my husband approves), but if he requires my assistance or my company my own plans must be put one side to meet his, not gracefully and by my own wish, but compulsorily and because he desires it. He rules over me, in fact, though the reins may be silken ones ; and I don't choose to be ruled. I don't think it is fair. Husbands and wives are co-partners, and should be accorded an equal voice in all matters. The idea of a wife's submission and obedience and all that twaddle is out of date. Women won't submit to it any longer, and the sooner men learn the lesson the better."

"Lady Barton would love to hear you talk," remarked Mrs. Bernard. "Those are exactly her sentiments."

"I shall be happy to talk with her," rejoined Lady Phyllis. "Is it to be to-morrow then, Cissy ? and shall I write a note to Colonel Bernard for you to take back with you ?"

"Yes, dear ; but be sure to say nothing about the club in it."

"You goose ! Haven't you more trust in me than that comes to ? Now, remember, Cissy, that I never interfere with another woman's private affairs. If you choose to keep this a secret from your husband to the end of your life, *I* shall not be the one to betray you. I think it is cowardly of you, but it is no business of mine. *I* should go to him, if I were you, and tell him the truth straightout, and dare him to prevent your doing as you choose. He can't lock you up; it's against the law."

"Ah, you don't know him, Phyllis ; he would bully me on the subject morning, noon, and night. I would rather never enter the club doors again than subject myself to it. And often he—he takes—you know what I mean—more than is good for him, and then it is terrible. I could not describe it to you. I am in fear of my life."

"Say no more," cried Lady Phyllis ; "that is quite enough. I will never persuade you to confide in him again. Cheat him as much as you like. Such a man deserves

to be cheated. If you were to poison him, I should not be the one to blame you."

She closed the note she had been writing as she spoke and put it into her companion's hand, and shortly afterward Mrs. Bernard went back to Moseley Gardens, with a comfortable conviction that she had found a powerful coadjutor and ally in Lady Phyllis Macnaughten.

CHAPTER VIII.

CISSY'S EARS ARE BOXED.

It was an unfortunate day for Mrs. Bernard to have taken "French leave," for the colonel happened to have encountered a series of disappointments, and his was not the heroic temperament to take disappointment well. In the first place he had received an invitation to escort Miss Nettleford to a matinée at the theater. This was the real reason for which he had refused to accompany his wife to Lady Phyllis' "At Home." There was nothing whatever wrong between him and Miss Nettlefold, who was far too uninteresting a lady for any man to risk getting into a scrape for, but she listened to all the complaints the colonel made about Cissy, and sympathized with him for having so careless and unaffectionate a wife. There are some men who cannot do without this sort of silly, sentimental twaddle from the lips of women —men like Colonel Bernard, who, having spent the best part of their lives in catering for the approbation and admiration of the *beau sexe*, are fain, when time has developed their charms without adding to their mental qualities, to put up with such appreciation as they can extract from old maids and widows, who are glad to retain any men—never mind how old, how ugly, or how stupid—by their side.

In this way Mrs. and Miss Nettlefold had made the colonel welcome at their afternoon tea table, and occasionally allowed him to escort them to places of amusement. He was at all events a man of some position, and men were, alas! becoming so scarce on the list of their acquaintance.

"Poor dear Colonel Bernard!" they would say to their friends; "it is really heartrending to hear him talk of

that wife of his, who makes his life a purgatory with her tempers and her airs! And he so good and patient with her, too! It is very hard for a man who has positively given up all his comforts in life for the sake of a girl who hadn't a penny of her own, to meet with such a sorry requital. He says, poor fellow! that he has no peace except when he is with us; and, for my part, I always make him heartily welcome. We like him so much—Letty and myself—we consider him so amiable and refined—such a perfect gentleman in every way. Don't we, Letty?"

"Well, mamma, he ought to have known better than to have married a silly, inexperienced girl like Mrs. Bernard," Miss Nettlefold would reply. "Why didn't he choose a woman of a sensible age? Not but what I am very sorry for him, for he is a most delightful companion—so good-natured and obliging—always ready to do anything for you, and such a sweet smile. It is quite a pleasure to go anywhere under his escort."

And consequently Miss Letty had sent the colonel a note the day before saying that she had a couple of tickets for the Vaudeville, and as mamma had a faceache would dear Colonel Bernard consider it too much trouble to accompany her instead.

Colonel Bernard was delighted. An afternoon spent in leaning over Miss Nettleford at the theater—puffing his spirit-laden breath into her face—whispering his time-worn stories into her ear—and initiating her into some of the jests which were esteemed "naughty" in his day, but at which every girl of the nineteenth century could have given him "points"—was much more soothing to his vanity than dancing attendance on his wife at Lady Phyllis' "At Home" would have been. So he came down to luncheon "dressed to kill," and brought forward a plea of business as an excuse for letting Cissy go alone.

But while she was enjoying herself with her old friend he was doomed to disappointment, for on arrival at the Nettlefolds' he was met by the ancient mother only, who informed him that "Letty was so sorry, but her Cousin Raynor, whom she had not seen for several months, had looked in quite unexpectedly just as she was preparing

for the theater, and so she felt bound to take him with her, and she hoped the dear colonel would not mind, but stay until they returned and take tea with her instead."

But the dear colonel *did* mind! It was just the sort of *contretemps* to rouse his worst feelings. His vanity was mortified—his attentions were slighted, a younger man had been put in his stead. And Mrs. Nettlefold did not improve matters by adding:

"You see, colonel, it was fitter the young ones should pair off together and leave us seniors to have a quiet chat. I hope you have no other engagement this afternoon. Letty will be so sorry if she does not see you at tea. You must stay with me till she comes home."

But the colonel was not to be mollified—he was furious, indignant, though he did not dare to show it. He declared that he had put off a most important engagement in order to place himself at Miss Nettlefold's service, and since she had found another escort he must hasten to fulfill it. He stalked out of the house with a very red face and a very foul tongue, with which he called Miss Nettlefold some names which would have made her open her eyes, could she have overheard him, as he took his way through the Park. He was so childishly chagrined by the rebuff to his insensate vanity that he felt he could not go to his club, nor anywhere, until he had obtained "a sop for Cerberus" in the shape of some female amenities that should pour balm upon his wound.

He bethought him of a certain Mrs. Harrison, with whom he had had a very decided flirtation before her marriage, when she had been Miss Lotty Fane—an actress at the theater in the garrison town where the Martineers had been temporarily located. Lotty Fane, as a second-rate artist on a small salary, had been flattered by the attentions of a colonel, and made herself considerably talked of by yielding to them. Since then she had married a respectable land agent, and sent Colonel Bernard intelligence of her whereabouts. He had never dreamed of visiting her until that afternoon, but with his wounded vanity had come a recollection of the *ci-devant* Miss Fane, and he wondered if he should

find her at home, and if she would be much flattered by receiving a call from him. Her address was in his pocket-book, and after a moment's consideration he wended his way thither. He found that the land agent's offices were situated in the Brompton Road, and that there was a private entrance to the house.

Colonel Bernard knocked at the door, almost timidly. Mr. Harrison, the land agent, was what he would have styled in his vernacular "a cad," and he felt as if he were lowering himself by paying his wife the compliment of a call. But his self-love and vanity were his predominant feelings, and the prospect of gratifying them, even though at the expense of others, his greatest pleasure. The little maid who answered the door said that Mrs. Harrison was at home, and asked him to walk upstairs. The burly colonel felt rather too big for the house as he made his way up the narrow staircase into the tiny sitting room above, where the agent's wife was seated at needlework. Lotty Fane had been a nice looking girl with her stage paint and powder on, surmounted by a golden wig, but she seemed commonplace and almost plain now in a print dress with a black silk apron. She did not appear very comfortable either, or pleased to see her old acquaintance. She blushed scarlet as he came into her presence, and, rising from her chair, dropped him a very distant courtesy. The fact is that Mrs. Harrison had become very much ashamed of the episode in her existence which included the acquaintance of Colonel Bernard, and since she had been married to an honest man who loved her, she would gladly have expunged it from her recollection. The revival of it, therefore, as typified by the colonel's visit, was anything but agreeable, and her looks said so. But he was too much occupied with himself and his own importance to perceive it.

"Well, Lotty," he commenced familiarly, "don't you know me? Have you forgotten all about Portsmouth? You *are* altered, though—upon my word, I should hardly have known you! What have you done to yourself? Where are all the little curls gone that I used to admire so much? It is too bad of you to tuck them out of

sight. But why don't you speak? Aren't you glad to see me?

"Oh, of course, colonel," replied the young woman, who did not know what to say. "Will you not take a chair? Shall I call my husband? Have you any business with him?"

"Husband—no! What do we want with husbands? Leave the man to his work. It will not be the first time that we have entertained each other, eh? But I can't say I think marriage has improved you, Lotty. You are plumper certainly, but not so lissome as you used to be in the old days. Let me see. How long was it ago? two years, eh? when you were playing *Aladdin* in the Christmas pantomime, and knocked me with those trim little ankles and feet of yours. Are they as pretty as ever? Let us see!" said the colonel, as with his stick he tried to lift her skirt from her feet.

The girl rose, trembling, and said in a nervous manner:

"Colonel Bernard, please to remember that I am a married woman now. I have left the stage for good and all, and I would rather forget the time when I was so foolish."

"Nonsense, nonsense, my dear! pretty women never forget—we won't let them. What has marriage got to do with it? It cannot make us strangers. Why, I'm married myself, but you see I have not forgotten you, nor ever mean to, either. But you haven't given me a kiss yet. That's not friendly. Come! I must have one, if only for old acquaintance' sake!"

He left his seat and approached her, as he spoke, but she backed away from him and stood on the defensive against the wall.

"No, no! you must not! I cannot allow it. All that sort of thing is over between us forever. My husband would be angry."

"Husband be ——!" exclaimed the colonel, as, secure in his own fascinations, he encroached upon the little fortress the woman had erected before her in the shape of a small table. "I am not going to give up my kiss for all the cads in London—no, by Jove! So let the land agent look after himself! I'll have that kiss, or——"

"I'm —— if you will!" exclaimed an irate voice, as a powerfully built man burst into the room and seized the colonel by the shirt collar.

"Oh, Jack! I am so glad you've come!" cried Lotty, in tears of agitation and distress.

"Here, here! you, sir—what are you about?" said Colonel Bernard, as he felt that his shirt collar was being irrevocably damaged.

"What am I about? Why, holding a cad by the collar; and I don't let him go either, till I've kicked him down my stairs."

"You cannot; you dare not!" fumed his adversary. "Do you know who I am, sir? I am Colonel Bernard of the Martineers!"

"I don't care who you are—you might be the Prince of Wales himself. I found you here, on my premises, attempting to insult my wife—and I'll kick you out into the street like a sack of coals!"

As the land agent spoke, he kept a tight grasp upon the colonel's collar, who grew redder and fumed and gasped so that he could hardly speak. The knowledge, also, that Mr. Harrison was powerfully applying his boot to the nether portion of his person was not calculated to soothe his perturbation.

"Take that, you old brute—and that—and that, and that!" exclaimed the land agent, as he hustled the grand colonel of the Martineers down the narrow staircase of his dwelling and landed him on the door mat, considerably the worse for wear.

"I'll have the law on you for this!" cried Bernard, as he scrambled up on his feet. "I'll make you pay for assaulting a man in my position! You'll wish you had thought twice before you laid your hand on me!" he continued, as he smoothed his battered hat and tried to arrange his tumbled attire.

"Do, by all means!" retorted Harrison. "I'd be proud to meet you in court and let the public hear your story. It would be cheap at any price. I find you trying to kiss my wife against her will, and you think, because you're a colonel perhaps, that the law would give it in your favor. Do you think I don't know all

about you, and the way you treated that girl at Portsmouth? Lotty has told me all about it, and now that I've made her an honest woman, you would like to come with your dirty kisses and your flatteries and unmake her, perhaps. Now look here, my fine boaster! If ever I catch you on my premises again, I won't let you off with a whole skin, if I pay my whole income for it! Get out as quick as you can, or I shan't be able to keep my hands off you for long."

"You are a low, vulgar cad!" replied the colonel, trying to be dignified, "and I shall not stoop to bandy words with you. But having taken what you are pleased to call, I suppose, your revenge, you will scarcely expect me to go out into the road in this condition. You will at least let me go into a room to arrange the disordered state of my clothes."

"Not a bit of it!" replied John Harrison. "Out you go, just as you are. If the crowd laugh at you, so much the better. If they ask you what is the matter, tell them you were caught kissing another man's wife, and they will say it served you right. Now, there's the door my fine fellow, and you can take your choice—go out, or be kicked out!"

The land agent threw wide the portal as he spoke, and the hapless colonel had no alternative but to slink away as best he could, and hail the first hansom he met, into which he crept amid the jeerings of the bystanders, who addressed a few questions to him, more pertinent than polite. Having his latchkey, he managed, on reaching Moseley Gardens, to sneak up to his bedroom without encountering the sharp eyes of the servants. But here a fresh annoyance awaited him—the telegram from Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, to say she intended keeping Cissy for the evening. When you are woefully out of temper, and feel moreover that the annoyance you are suffering from is entirely due to your own fault, it is an extra aggravation to have no legitimate butt to vent it on. Colonel Bernard felt the absence of his wife on that particular evening to be a fresh injury, and he swore at all women collectively. There was some hope, however, that a good dinner and a glass of his favorite Burgundy

might soothe his perturbed feelings. Having rearranged his damaged wardrobe, therefore, he descended to the dining room to find that the fish was sodden and vilely fried, and the shoulder of mutton underdone. This accident added the last drop to the colonel's wrath and paved the way for a warm reception for his wife on her return home.

As Phyllis' carriage deposited her at her own door, Cissy heard her heart beating, notwithstanding the wire that had been sent to say where she was. She ran up the steps to the hall-door all of a tremble, and knocked with a shaking hand. Jane's first words did not reassure her:

"Oh, lor, ma'am! I *am* glad you have come home."

"Why, what's the matter? Is the colonel in? Didn't he get my telegram?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am! that's all right enough, but he have been going on that dreadful ever since dinner as you never did. Cook had almost made up her mind as she'd go without warning and before you came home, for she say it's what no mortial can abide."

Cissy leaned up against the passage wall for support.

"Oh, Jane! you frighten me. What is it all about? Was the dinner wrong?"

"Well, it might have been better, perhaps, but no reasonable creature would have made sich a fuss about it. He's been just raving. I pity you, I do. But don't you be afraid on him—I'll stand by you."

"Oh, Jane! I daren't go up alone. Do come with me," said poor Cissy, who could hardly stand for fright. But at this juncture the colonel's voice was heard thundering down the staircase:

"Who's there? Is that Mrs. Bernard? Why doesn't she come upstairs, Jane? Tell Mrs. Bernard that I am waiting for her."

"All right, sir! she's coming," answered the servant, as she urged her mistress to do as she was bid.

Cissy felt paralyzed with terror. Her heart beat to suffocation. She could only murmur, "Oh, Jane! you *must* come too," as she slowly mounted to the drawing room to meet her master.

Colonel Bernard was waiting at the head of the stairs

to receive her. As she reached his side, he placed his hand on her shoulder and pushed her before him into the drawing room, slamming the door behind them and thus preventing the entrance of the servant, whose promise of protection he had overheard.

"And now, Mrs. Bernard," he commenced, as soon as they found themselves alone, "what have you to say for yourself?"

Cissy regarded him shrinkingly.

"What do you expect me to say?" she replied. "Phyllis sent you a wire to tell you where I was."

"That is no answer to my question. Of course Lady Phyllis would send a wire when you had consented to stay with her. But what do you mean by accepting invitations without any reference to me? What right have you to absent yourself from my house without leave? Your proper place is *here*, looking after my comfort—seeing that my dinner is properly cooked, that the servants do their duty, instead of sitting down to eat a good dinner yourself, while your husband has to put up with cold fish and raw mutton. It's reversing the order of things, Mrs. Bernard, and if you don't know it you must be taught it!"

"I'm sorry the dinner was spoiled," replied his wife. "It was so plain, I thought cook could not make a mistake."

"*Plain!* I should think it was—deucedly plain! Not fit for a dog, in fact; and it's not what I've been used to, Mrs. Bernard, let me tell you that!"

"But, Henry, it was impossible for me to know it, or I would have come home, of course, only Phyllis said she was sure you would not mind just for once in a way; and it is so long since we met, and we had so much to say to each other."

"Faugh! a lot of twaddle that no one else would listen to. Is that any excuse—is anything an excuse for neglecting your husband and your duty? If you imagine I married you—a pauper—in order that you should galivant about the town while I remained at home to superintend the housekeeping, you are very much mistaken. I married you in order that I might have a little comfort

in my own house, and I intend to have it, too. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"It is the very first time," faltered Cissy.

"And it will be the very last time too!" sneered the colonel. "The annoyance I have suffered this day beats anything I ever experienced!"

"It *is* very annoying of cook not to be more careful, when she knows how particular you are about your dinner," said the girl, not knowing what else to say.

"It is very annoying of *you*, you mean," rejoined the colonel. "What is the good of you, if you don't see after such things? You had to do it at home, I warrant! I took you from the very depths of poverty—not enough to eat, half the days in the week."

"It's not true!" exclaimed his wife, with a momentary courage born of despair. "We always had enough to eat at home, and we were very happy there," with a low sob.

"And so was I very happy before I saw you, and very sorry I am that I ever did see you. When I think of the old days when I was in the service—before I was such a fool to leave it on your account; when I remember what I was then, admired, looked up to, the pet of society, courted on all sides and invited everywhere—and compare them with these dirty rooms and your filthy dinners of blackened fish and raw mutton—by jingo! I wish I had cut my throat before I had given it all up!"

"So do I," replied Cissy; and then, struck by the ineptitude of the remark, she added, "that is, if it would have made you happier, Henry."

"Very well; very well!" said the colonel sarcastically. "I shall not forget your words, madam. You wish I was dead, do you? You'd like to see a knife drawn across my throat! That's a nice thing for a wife to say—a wife whom I raised from nothing, positively nothing, to the honor of bearing my name. I shall not forget it, you may rest assured of that, and I'll make you suffer for it, as sure as my name's Henry Bernard. And now have you anything more to say?"

"Lady Phyllis Macnaughten sent you this note," said Cissy, holding it out to him. He took it and read it with a frown.

"No, you'll not drive with her to-morrow afternoon—you'll not drive with anybody nor go out anywhere again, until you have learned to do your duty. Your duty is here, madam, *here—here—here*"—with an emphatic bang on the table with his fist at each word; "and you shall have neither friends nor amusements until you have learned how to obey me!"

"You are unfair, unjust!" replied his wife, relapsing into tears. "I have hardly had a friend since you married me. You have kept me like a prisoner. You go out every day yourself, but I am supposed never to want any amusement. My life is a misery to me; but I will not hold my tongue about it any longer. If I am not to see Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, who was my friend long before I married you, she shall know the reason. I will tell her and everybody what an unhappy girl I am."

This assurance on the part of trembling little Cissy took Colonel Bernard completely by surprise. He had not believed that it was in her to take the bull by the horns after such a fashion; but her boldness excited his anger still more against her. He was astonished; it was as if she had suddenly turned and bit him. He forgot himself, and with a sudden impulse of rage, he boxed her ears smartly.

Cissy stood aghast at the insult—then, with a cry of indignation and rage she turned from him and ran upstairs. As soon as she had left him, the colonel saw that he had made a mistake. He was six foot two in his stockings and weighed sixteen stone—she was five foot nothing and turned the scale at seven. It was a dastardly action to have struck her, when she had no possibility of redress. But the majority of men are cowards—rank, unmitigated cowards—when they have only their wives to deal with and no one is standing by.

Cissy ran upstairs as fast as her shaking little legs would carry her, and knocked with trembling fingers at Jane's bedroom door.

"Let me in, Jane! Let me in, quick!" she gasped, and the servant unlocked the door.

"Why, lor, my dear lady! whatever is the matter?"

she demanded, as she saw her mistress' frightened demeanor.

"The colonel has struck me! I am afraid of him! I can't stay alone with him. You must let me sleep with you, Jane!"

"Struck you, has he? Well, I thought it would come to that some day, and I'm your witness how he's served you all along!" exclaimed Jane. "Come in, my dear lady, and lie down here. No one shan't get in after you unless it's over my body."

And then the colonel heard the door close again and the key turn in the lock. He did not feel very comfortable at the turn affairs had taken. He had struck the blow almost before he was aware of what he was doing, and he had never imagined that Cissy would have resented it in such a fashion.

That she should have been bold enough to make his conduct public, and confide in his own servants, was what he would himself have termed "an eye-opener." He felt very uncomfortable as he sat in the drawing room by himself, and imagined what the two women were saying to each other above. After a while spent in meditation, he went up to his room and lay awake half the night, wondering what would be the end of it all, and what had given rise to this unexpected ebullition of resentment on his wife's part. Would she write home and tell her mother of his treatment—would she confide in Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, as she had done in Jane, and make it disagreeable for him all around. Had he not better soothe, instead of further irritating her, and accede to her wish to spend the following afternoon with her friend. He might make her silence the condition of his indulgence.

Satisfied with the decision at which he had arrived, Colonel Bernard went to sleep and expected to meet his wife the next morning as if nothing unusual had occurred between them.

"Well! has my naughty girl recovered her temper this morning?" he inquired, with an air of would-be playfulness, as he encountered her at the breakfast table.

"I was not aware that I had been 'naughty,'" she replied coldly.

"What, not to run away from your husband and lock yourself up with Jane?" said the colonel, with a nervous smile.

"I did that, in order that you should not strike me a second time."

"Come, Cissy! forget and forgive. I was not thinking of what I was doing. It's my first offense, you know, and I promise you it shall not occur again. Isn't that sufficient?"

"I don't think so," said the girl. The colonel did not quite know what to make of her. She had evidently got the bit between her teeth. He took Phyllis' note from his pocket, and fingered it nervously.

"If you had only waited a little longer last night, I should have told you that you had my permission to accept this invitation from your friend—only you were so hasty and impulsive—it is a woman's greatest fault."

"I thought you said just now that it was yourself who was hasty and impulsive," remarked his wife.

"By Jove! she had me there," thought the colonel, but all he answered was:

"Well, never mind that. I was about to tell you that you can drive with Lady Phyllis this afternoon—you can send her a wire to say you have my leave to do so. So now I suppose you will be satisfied. But I must have no more confidences between Jane and you. It is most degrading that you should let these low creatures know all that takes place between your husband and yourself. *Our* relationship to one another is sacred, remember."

"I wish you had kept it so," said Cissy.

Colonel Bernard could hardly believe his ears. *Was* it Cissy who was speaking, or some changeling in her stead. He had not believed it possible she had so much pluck.

"Well, perhaps I do the same. There's a concession for you. And you can visit your friend this afternoon, on condition that you do not tell her anything about this foolish little affair. Do you agree?"

"To what?" asked his wife.

"That Lady Phyllis Macnaughten is not to hear of our difference."

"I do not suppose it would interest her. She can read of men ill-using their wives in the newspaper any day."

"And are you not grateful for my concession, then?"

"What concession?"

"In allowing you to drive with your friend this afternoon."

"I intended to drive with her," said Cissy quietly.

"What, without my permission? Do you mean to say that you do not owe me your obedience?"

"I think your behavior has canceled that obligation on my part. I believe anybody who heard of it would say the same."

"You don't mean to say you are going to repeat it all over the town," exclaimed the colonel, with genuine alarm.

"Not if you accede me the liberty which every woman has the right to demand from her husband—liberty to choose my own friends, and follow my own pursuits for the future."

"Does that signify that I am to be left to eat all my meals by myself?"

"No, that was an accident, as I have already told you, and it shall not happen again. But I am going to drive with Lady Phyllis to-day, all the same."

"Oh, go to the devil!" said the colonel angrily, for he perceived that he had got the worst of the argument; that that unlucky blow had relaxed his power over his wife; and that, unless he wished the story to be made common property, he should have to give her more of her own way in the future.

This conviction, together with the recollection of the treatment he had received at the hands of "that cad, Harrison," the day before, and the defalcation of his quondam admirer, Miss Nettlefold, caused him to be in an execrable temper for the rest of the day, though he dared not show it openly either to his wife or his servants.

And Cissy went for a drive with her friend Lady

Phyllis, and returned punctually to dinner, which she sat through in silence; not deigning to give her husband a single hint of where she had been or what she had done.

For the first time in his married life, the bully colonel felt the tables were turned on him, and by his own hand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PUSHAHEAD CLUB.

LADY PHYLLIS MACNAUGHTEN was punctual in calling for her little friend, and Mrs. Bernard skipped into the carriage as if everything were right, but they had not driven far from Moseley Gardens before Phyllis perceived that all was not as it should be. Cissy's eyes did not bear any traces of weeping, nor did she utter a complaint—but there was a hard look about her mouth which had not been there before, and her manner was *distrait* and preoccupied.

"What is the matter?" demanded Lady Phyllis, as she laid her hand upon Cissy's. The girl looked her straight in the face.

"Phyllis, you asked me yesterday if I had ever been struck, and I answered no. I could not say that to-day."

"My dear, he has surely never dared——"

Mrs. Bernard nodded her head oracularly.

"Oh, the brute!" cried Lady Phyllis; "wouldn't I like to see someone do the same to him! How could he have the heart to do it—to you, who are such a little thing. He must be a coward! What did you say to him?"

"Nothing. I went upstairs and slept with the housemaid all night."

Phyllis looked shocked. This was a measure which her pride could never have permitted her to take under any circumstances.

"With the housemaid! Oh, then the servants know of it? How dreadful! Cissy, you shouldn't have done that. It would have been better to have sat up all night."

"And been made a butt all the time for his insults and his blows? No, I had not the courage. I was afraid to stay alone with him. Jane was better than nobody. I felt he would be ashamed to follow me up there."

"It is very, very terrible," said Lady Phyllis, "and a stop must be put to it, somehow. Cissy, have you no relations who would interfere on your behalf? How old are your brothers? As you have no father, they would be the proper persons to take up your cause."

"They would be of no good, Phyllis. The oldest is only sixteen. They are only boys. No, if I cannot find a way out of it myself, I must continue to bear it as best I may."

"My dear Cissy, how should a poor little weak thing like you find a way out of it for yourself? Why, you know you are frightened of the man."

"I know I am—so frightened that I think fear has made me desperate. But he is frightened in his turn to-day. He thinks I am going to tell you about it. And he is right."

"He will be all the more angry with you, I am afraid, when he finds that out."

"He won't find it out. I don't mean to tell him. I mean to keep him on tenter-hooks. Nothing makes him so angry as when I pretend to be so stupid that I cannot understand what he means. He cannot very well blame me for being stupid, you know, because that is not my own doing. But I understand perfectly, all the while," said Cissy, with a cunning look that betokened worse for the man who thoroughly roused her than the decision of the cleverest, most courageous woman God ever made. Cunning, silly people are the most dangerous adversaries we can encounter in this world.

"I believe, after all, that you know how to hold your own with him," laughed Lady Phyllis. "But here we are in Baker Street. Tell the man the number of the club, Cissy."

"Three hundred, on the left," said Cissy, and in a minute after they were deposited at the doors.

Lady Phyllis was in a state of great inward excitement as she entered the portals of the Pushahead Club. She halted a moment on the door step and inflated her nostrils, and drew in the air of Liberty with her breath. This was what she had dreamed of for so long, what she had had no idea existed, till the day before, a Hall of

Freedom for Women. Here was what men had insisted could never be : a place where women met in friendship and sympathy together, united by the same ties, working for the same cause—banded together to right their wrongs, and to help their sex to evade the tyranny of man. The very place for such as poor Cissy, Phyllis thought, as the vision passed through her mind, and she felt glad that her little friend had found such a harbor of refuge, the assistance of which she might sorely need some day.

Lady Barton, who was a charming president and hostess, was delighted to make the acquaintance of Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, and volunteered to show her through the building before they entered the guests' reception rooms. Of course the ladies chatted together first, and Phyllis told Lady Barton exactly how she was situated and how charmed she had been to hear from Mrs. Bernard of the institution of the Pushahead ; how often she had dreamed of such a haven for women, and how delighted she would be to become one of its members —*i. e.*, if the president could assure her that her presence would be welcome among them.

"My dear Lady Phyllis, what an idea!" exclaimed Lady Barton. "Why, the committee will, I am sure, be charmed to receive your name for election. I have nothing to do with that part of the business, you know. It is left entirely to the ladies of the committee, but I have no doubt of the result. We shall be proud to have you as a member. This is our restaurant," continued Lady Barton, throwing open the swinging door of a magnificent apartment, furnished in true restaurant style, with separately laid tables, decorated with flowers, and covered with silver and glass.

"Oh, this is delightful!" cried Phyllis ; "but do your members often dine at the club?"

"Some of them scarcely ever dine anywhere else, but they are generally the unmarried ladies," replied the president ; "but we serve sometimes as many as two hundred luncheons in the course of the day. Meals can be had here at any time up to ten o'clock at night. Very convenient for ladies who want to go to the theater, or

any evening entertainment. And they can bring their gentlemen friends here too," added Lady Barton, with a giggle ; "that is, they can introduce them to afternoon tea at any time between the hours of five and seven, and if they wish to ask them to dinner they hand in their names the day before. We are obliged to keep a little *surveillance* over our younger members," concluded the president, with a maternal smile at Mrs. Bernard.

"Now, Lady Barton, I am sure you cannot complain of *me*," said Cissy, blushing ; "for it is seldom enough that I trouble you with any of my friends at dinner. I don't get the opportunity to do it."

"Well, well, we never tell tales out of school in the Pushahead," replied Lady Barton, and Phyllis might have felt surprised at the conciliatory nature of the remark in a temple dedicated to Liberty, had not her attention been diverted by the appearance of a lady whom at first sight she mistook for a gentleman. She had walked leisurely into the restaurant, apparently for a late luncheon, and removed her hat on entering, just as a man would have done. Her hair was cut quite short to her head, and parted on one side. She wore a starched white shirt, with collar, tie, and studs, her cloak, coat, or jacket, it is difficult to know how to designate it—descended to below her knees—her cuffs were very much *en évidence*, and the only part of her dress which proved her female was a scanty black skirt, which fell to her ankles, and in a strong wind might well have been mistaken for those articles which ladies are said to be so desirous to wear.

"What an extraordinary person!" whispered Lady Phyllis, with open eyes.

"Oh, hush!" said Lady Barton. "That is Miss Sellinger, one of our most distinguished members. She is the lady who has so successfully fought our battles with the omnibus conductors, for refusing to stop when ordered to do so. She poked out the eye of one of the conductors with the ferule of her umbrella, and had heavy costs to pay in consequence, but they are more attentive to one's wishes since. Yes, indeed, we owe a great deal to Miss Sellinger. Let me introduce you to her."

And thereupon, Lady Phyllis found herself in a posi-

tion to add Miss Sellinger's name to the list of her acquaintance. But she could not help letting her eye rove, during the conversation that ensued, over the familiar costume which she had been used to see under such different circumstances.

"But we must not detain Lady Phyllis," Lady Barton interposed. "She has not seen over our domains yet. This," she continued, passing into another apartment, "is our smoking room."

"But what is the use of that?" demanded Phyllis. The president regarded her with a calm sort of pity.

"It is evident that you do not know half the privileges that we enjoy in the Pushahead, Lady Phyllis. I think there is not one in ten of our members that does not smoke, and pretty regularly into the bargain."

"Ladies smoke!" cried Lady Phyllis, but she said no more, for there were about forty women already occupying the smoking divan, and apparently enjoying themselves over the occupation.

"Ladies," said the president, "this is Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, who is honoring us by making an inspection of our premises."

Some of the smokers bowed—others nodded in a familiar manner—one of them said:

"Well, I hope Lady Phyllis has come to the conclusion that we know how to take care of ourselves."

"I have indeed!" returned Phyllis, with a smile.

"Here are our lavatories and dressing rooms," said Lady Barton, as they left the smoking divan behind them.

"But does anybody sleep here?" asked Phyllis, in surprise.

"No, we have no chambers as yet. We have not room enough; no one lives on the premises except myself and servants. But these rooms are for the use of such ladies as think it too far to go home in case of wishing to change their dress for the evening, so do it here. There are their separate drawers, you see, which contain their evening dresses——"

"Oh, just as Ronald—that is, Mr. Macnaughten, you know—keeps a dress suit at his club in case a friend asks him out suddenly and he has no time to come home."

"Just so. The men have had the same privileges for years past. It is high time we shared it."

"It's awful fun for those who can do it," grumbled Cissy. "No one need know where they've gone, or whom they've gone with. I know I should often skip off to the theater this way, if I only had a good excuse to make for my absence from home."

"Ah, Cissy, such things are meant for older, more sensible women than you," said Phyllis, laughing. "I think you are better as you are for a little while longer. But I never saw anything more complete than your arrangements, Lady Barton. You appear to have thought of everything. I had no idea your club would be so like a gentleman's club as this."

"And why should it not be, Lady Phyllis?" was the rejoinder. "It was instituted to show the other sex that we are human creatures—items of society, with the same requirements and the ability to make proper use of our advantages as themselves; so it would not do to be behind them in any particular."

"No, indeed, and why should we not be entitled to as many good things as they are? And they have been saying all the time that we woman could not support an establishment like this; that we must needs come to loggerheads over it; that only men can agree together, and that we talk too much of our own affairs and each other's ever to be at peace for long together. Isn't it nonsense?"

"Nonsense, indeed, my dear Lady Phyllis. The gentlemen will have to alter their opinions upon this and many other things before long. They will find that we are as capable of maintaining a social establishment by ourselves, as of defeating them in examinations and rivaling them in sports. The Crystal Palace Cycle Races came off this morning, and many of the cyclists are here at present, changing their uniforms. Here is one on her way to her dressing room. Good-afternoon, Miss Nelson," continued the president, as the lady in question approached their party. "I am sorry you were not the winner this morning, but all cannot be equally successful."

"Better luck next time," replied the cyclist, who was

arrayed in a Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers and stockings, like a young fellow going after the rabbits. "But, —— it (I beg your pardon, but it does make a woman lose her temper). Hang it, I suppose I should have said, it was the most deucedly unfair thing I ever saw. Renshaw drew the outside edge as true as I stand here ; I saw her do it myself, and she tucked it up under her sleeve, and took another slip. There's cheating for you. When it came to my turn to draw, there was her beastly slip on the table again, and, as bad luck would have it, I picked it up and had no chance to chuck it away as the fellow was close by me at the time. ——I mean, hang him."

"Oh, well, well!" interposed the president, who looked a little uneasy under this exhibition, "we must hope for better things next time, Miss Nelson. Your dressing room is quite ready for you. Good-afternoon," and she hurried Lady Phyllis and Cissy away.

The inspection of the dressing rooms brought the ladies round to the library, reception, and committee rooms, all of which were lofty, well furnished, and decorated in the latest style. In the reception room, where most of the members were at that time assembled, Lady Phyllis Macnaughten met with an enthusiastic welcome. Lady Barton introduced all the principal members of the club to her, and she was soon engaged in an animated conversation with Miss Noble and Lady Alexander Fox, of whose antecedents she had heard, but whom she had never met before. She looked at her with interest—the heroine (as Captain Austin had said) of one of the nastiest divorce cases that had ever filled three columns of the daily papers for several days in succession. She had expected to see a coarse, rough-mannered, loud-voiced person ; but she was agreeably disappointed. Lady Alexander was one of the sweetest, gentlest, most silvery-tongued women in creation. She was a tall blonde, with soft blue eyes and a winning smile. She was dressed in faultless taste, and looked a high-born woman from head to foot. Lady Phyllis took an exceptional fancy for her. She questioned whether she could have been correctly informed ; whether this were

really the woman whom all London had spoken of in terms of contempt, and if she were, whether the whole world had not been mistaken, and only Lady Alexander Fox right. She listened to her conversation with pleasure, and thought that Miss Noble, the author of "The Revolt of the Harem," was not to be compared with her, either in flow of language or charm of manner. All the committee ladies gathered round Phyllis, and thanked her for coming to visit them and go over their domains.

"And oh, Lady Phyllis!" cried one enthusiast, "how I do hope you will become a member of the Pushahead. *You*, with your *entrée* to society, and your many opportunities of spreading the knowledge of what you see and hear with us, far and wide, might be the means of starting another club, for we are sadly hampered for room here already. We have five hundred members."

"And each one wanting a dressing room to herself," interposed Lady Barton.

"How I wish you could have known our dear Miss Moberley!" sighed Lady Matthew Winterton. "Such a woman, Lady Phyllis! Her death is the greatest blow we have sustained since we started. You would have been charmed with her experiences. She had shot eleven lions to her own gun, I think."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed another lady, "and brought home a darling little lion cub, and it was so tame, till one day it took to gnawing her ankles, and they had to send for a doctor to get it off, and she was obliged to send it to the Zoo. Such a pity! just as it had begun to know her, and run when she called it."

"Yes, you would have loved her as a sister, as we all did," said Lady Alexander Fox, in her dulcet tones, "but she has gone from us for ever."

"No such thing!" interpolated another voice. "It is only your ignorance that makes you think so, Lady Alexander. I saw and spoke to her last evening, through the mediumship of Mrs. Pooley Poole."

Lady Phyllis looked up, astonished.

"We all respect your theories, Mrs. Maxwell," replied Lady Matthew Winterton, "but this is not the time to

introduce them. Strangers might be alarmed, or offended, by a relation of your experiences in spiritualism."

"More fools they!" responded Mrs. Maxwell tartly. "If a thing is true, the sooner we recognize the fact, the better. Spiritualism is a truth, as I am able to testify, so why should I be ashamed to acknowledge it? You say that Miss Moberley is gone—and I say it is not true. She cannot be gone since she is here, at this moment. I see her quite distinctly, standing beside that lady"—pointing to Lady Phyllis.

"Oh!" exclaimed Phyllis, in a faint voice, "I think it must be time for me to go home."

"Pray do not think of such a thing," said the president. "I hope you will do me the honor to take tea with me and these ladies here."

She waved her hand toward Lady Alexander, Lady Matthew, and Miss Noble—upon which the discomfited spiritualist walked away, murmuring to herself. A *recherché* little meal followed, and Phyllis, after a couple of hours' delightful talk, rose to leave with Cissy; shaking hands cordially with her new-made friends before they parted. Her head was burning with new ideas—her heart palpitating with excitement—she was enchanted with all she had seen and heard, and openly expressed her gratitude to Cissy for having introduced her to such a charming set of women. It is true that the cycling, the smoking, the swearing, and the spiritualism had somewhat startled her; but she decided that if you set up a representative club, you must expect to find, and you should wish to get, all sorts of women together—anyone, as she said to Cissy—that will help to show the world of what the sex is capable. The gloom that settled down on her little friend's face as they neared Moseley Gardens reminded Phyllis of what she had confided to her on starting.

"Ah, my poor Cissy!" she said; "this club may be of the greatest service to you yet. Lady Alexander was telling me the good they had done with regard to stopping cruelty to animals—so surely they would be still more energetic when the cruelty concerns one of their own sex. If ever I am a member of that club, the first thing I shall

advocate is holding out the hand of help and fellowship to such poor women as are subject to the tyranny or brutality of men. For the laws are terribly against us, Cissy, to this day; and I do not suppose even a poor little weak thing like you would get any redress for your wrongs until you were within an inch of your life."

"I don't suppose I should," replied Mrs. Bernard sadly. "But you must not call it by so grand a name, Phyllis. He only boxed my ears, after all."

"And enough, too!" cried Lady Phyllis indignantly. "I should like to see Mr. Macnaughten, or any other man, box my ears. I'd walk out of his house the very same day."

"But you have an aristocratic family and name to protect you, Phyllis, and I have nobody. If I left the colonel, I might go to the workhouse. My mother could not take me back again. They are very badly off as it is, and I have no influential friends like you."

"Cissy, that is very naughty of you to say," replied Lady Phyllis. "*I* am your friend, and if ever you want a home, you shall find one with me. Now, remember, that is a bargain. I won't have you knocked about by a brute like Colonel Bernard. It is about time we women stuck up for one another and put down such tyranny. I am sure the members of the Pushahead would not see you struck for nothing."

"Do you think so?" replied Cissy, with a faint smile. "I am afraid they have not all such hearts as yours, Phyllis. But I have——"

At that moment, a gentleman walking on the pavement raised his hat to Mrs. Bernard. He was in no wise a noticeable personage, and Phyllis would not have thought twice about the matter, had not Cissy blushed a deep crimson as she returned his salutation. Then her friend looked at him, and saw nothing but a tall man with fair hair and a fashionable appearance.

"A friend of yours, Cissy?" she said, rather curiously.

"Yes, that is, I know him a little," replied Mrs. Bernard, with some confusion.

"What is his name, dear?"

"Captain Austin—Jack Austin, they call him. He

knows the colonel—he knows all the men of his late regiment. He was telling me the other day."

In her desire to appear to know very little of Captain Austin, Cissy was making a dozen excuses where one would have sufficed, and thereby raised the suspicions of her companion.

"Why, Cissy, one would think I was the colonel himself by the nervous state I have put you in. It is very natural you should be acquainted with this captain, my dear. I suppose your husband does not forbid every man the house, does he?"

"Oh, but indeed he does!" responded Cissy quickly. "He always asks Jane, when he comes in of an evening, who has called and if I have left the house, and we are obliged to concoct such awful stories between us. That's why he won't let me go out alone—for fear I should speak to anybody out of doors."

"And where do you see this Captain Austin, then?"

"Oh, I don't know! We meet occasionally in the Park, or at Whiteley's," replied Cissy, stammering guiltily; "but very seldom, you know, Phyllis—quite by accident, of course—one cannot help running across people in town—particularly if they live near."

Lady Phyllis answered her quite in a maternal tone.

"Cissy, dear, take my advice. Don't ever make any appointments with gentlemen, or some day you will get into a scrape. Let them call to see you at home—there can be no harm in that—but once you are found out to have made an assignation, it will be terrible work for you. You are too timid to bear the brunt of such a discovery—the colonel would have just cause for anything he might do—and you would be a greater prisoner than ever afterward. Don't forget what I say, there's a dear child. Bring any of your men friends to my house, if you like, and talk to them there—but don't meet them on your own account. And now good-by, for here we are at Moseley Gardens. Come and see me again very soon. Don't wait for a formal call—come in whenever you like, and if I am out, sit down till I return, and treat me like a real friend, won't you? For I see you want a friend, my poor Cissy."

She kissed her as she concluded, and Mrs. Bernard stood on the steps of her house, half crying and half laughing, and waving her hand in a childish manner, until the horses of Lady Phyllis Macnaughten's carriage had turned the corner.

As for Phyllis, she went home thinking very much of her little friend, and wondering what the members of such a club as the Pushahead could effect in such a case. Sympathy they would of course extend, but Cissy needed help as well as sympathy. It was not a case for stringent measures, perhaps, and it is a difficult thing to interfere between husband and wife; but Phyllis judged wisely in believing that, if more publicity were thrown upon such cowardly acts of cruelty, they would soon cease.

There is nothing a coward dreads more than to have his cowardice made known. Alone with his hapless wife, in the privacy of home, without an auditor or witness, Colonel Bernard could bully and intimidate and strike his victim; but if some of her fellow-women made a point of invading that home in a polite way and gaining her confidence, and popping in at untoward hours, he might begin to fear lest he should be caught red-handed, or Cissy be found suffering from the effects of a blow or nervous fright, and so, for his own sake, be induced to be more reasonable. If women only held by each other more, Lady Phyllis thought, they would suffer less, but they do not. They complain that men stand by each other—even to reticence regarding their mutual vices—why should not women do the same? Even if they do wrong, why should not their own sex cover up their delinquencies? It is only giving them the same chance as men take for themselves. And then she remembered the Pushahead Club, and felt a warm glow course through her veins, as she thought that here at least was an assembly of women who had bound themselves, like the knights of old, to stand up for each other, through right and wrong.

CHAPTER X.

A CONJUGAL ARGUMENT.

As Lady Phyllis entered her house, she walked straight up to her own room. She was engaged to a large dance that evening; her ball dress of *eau de Nil* brocade and chiffon was lying on the bed, ready for her to put on—Louise was in attendance to aid her in dressing. But she was tired, she averred, and it was late into the bargain. She would not dress till after dinner; they were not due at the dance till ten o'clock. So she walked downstairs in an ordinary costume, and entered the library. This room was supposed to be dedicated to Mr. Macnaughten, since no one else ever used it. It was a long, narrow room, lined with old oak bookshelves. The windows were of stained glass, the floor was covered by a Persian carpet. In a large armchair sat Ronald Macnaughten, so absorbed in his book that he did not hear the entrance of his wife until Lady Phyllis was close to him. She leaned over the back of his chair, and kissed him lightly on the forehead. It was a kiss of affection or of duty—which you will—but there was no passion or sentiment in it. She would have been surprised if you had told her she was cold; she would probably have refuted the accusation warmly, and replied that not half the wives in London kissed their husbands when they went out or returned from an excursion. Yet the truth remained that there was no flavor in the kiss, either to the giver or to the recipient.

Macnaughten bestirred himself on its receipt, yawned, stretched, and asked:

"Has the first gong sounded yet?"

"I don't know," replied Phyllis; "it may have. I have been in only a few minutes."

"You are not dressed," he said, deigning to look at her.

"No! I'm not going to dress this evening, till it is time to go."

"Go! Go where?"

"To the Tauntons'. Have you forgotten this is the night for their 'Small and Early'?"

"Oh, bother it, yes! Have we really to go through the treadmill again? What a curse this London life is. I am half determined to cut it altogether. I think we should be much happier living in the country, on our little estate in Roxburgh."

"*You* would, you mean, among the pheasants and partridges. I don't think *I* should."

"Why, I thought you hated London life as much as I do."

"I hate a life of monotony and idleness—a life where one's brains have no opportunity of expansion, nor one's intellect of food. But I don't fancy that need would be supplied in Roxburgh."

"Where can you supply it in London?" demanded her husband.

"I have not hitherto, I confess, but I think I have found a channel for culture and interest at last. Where do you think I have come from?"

"How can I guess. From anywhere your crazy fancy may have led you—Bedlam, perhaps, or the Leper Hospital?"

"You give me credit for refined tastes, though I might have been worse employed than in making myself useful in either of the places you have mentioned. But you are mistaken—I have come from the Pushahead Club."

"*Where?*" cried Macnaughten, starting from his chair.

"Don't knock over the table in your energy. From the Pushahead Club, of which I hope I shall soon be a member."

"*Never!*" exclaimed her husband energetically. "I will not have it! I utterly forbid it! You shall do no such thing!"

"Are you speaking to *me?*" demanded Lady Phillis, drawing herself up to her full height.

"Most undoubtedly I am, and I repeat that I will not let you become a member of that club. It is a disgraceful institution. It is composed of a lot of women who have made themselves notorious among men for their effrontery and outspokenness. They are people whom no one wants to know. I will not have my wife's name written down among them."

"How utterly unjust you are!" retaliated Phyllis; "like all men, directly their wishes are crossed in any way. You know nothing of what you are talking. The Pushahead Club, instead of being composed, as you affirm, of women whom no one else will know, numbers some of the brightest intellects and best-known names in London among its members—names which you should be proud to think you have a chance of becoming acquainted with, through my means. Lady Barton is the president, and that is in itself sufficient to guarantee the status of the ladies who belong to it."

"Stuff and nonsense!" replied Macnaughten. "The president has nothing whatever to do with the members of a club, who are elected through the committee. And Dalgairns told me enough about the Pushahead the other evening. He said that Miss Noble is the 'boss' there. There's a nice person for my wife to know! You'll be a walking encyclopedia of the diseases of mankind next. Dalgairns told me, whatever I did, to keep you away from such a set, and by Jove! I will."

"You are reckoning without your host," replied Phyllis, "for I am going to send in my name for election to-morrow."

"You mean to defy me, then?"

"Not at all! but I mean to act on my own judgment in a matter that solely concerns myself. Surely you will admit that at the age of two-and-twenty I am competent to decide on such a small matter. I never made any objection to your belonging to the Celestials, though, if I am not mistaken, it is considered one of the most sporting clubs in town."

"What has that to do with it?" said Macnaughten impatiently; "what does it signify whom *I* associate with? I am a man——"

"*Merci!*" said Lady Phyllis, with a little *moue*, "perhaps you consider me too childish even to be aware of that fact. But I interrupt you. Were you going to add that, being a man, you could not be made worse than you are by any associates?"

"No, I was not! I don't suppose there's a quieter fellow in town than I am, nor one who goes out less without his wife. But, with you it is a totally different thing. I will not have you hobnobbing with these New Women—imbibing all their new-fangled doctrines—learning all they can tell you about men—matters much better left alone by your sex—and ending perhaps by despising your husband, and becoming too fine and intellectual to look after your baby."

"Oh, dear! you place a very small price upon intellect," said Phyllis. "I wonder why, if the effects of cultivating it are so pernicious, you sit day after day, stuffing your brains with fresh matter. How do you reconcile the apparent anomaly?"

"By reminding you of the fact at which you seemed to take offense before; namely, that I am a man and you a woman; and that what may be innocuous in my case may prove dangerous in yours. Come, Phyllis! you are not in earnest in this matter. Say you are having a joke at my expense—that you are not seriously contemplating such a step."

"I am, indeed. I paid a visit to the Pushahead Club this afternoon, and was delighted with what I saw. Lady Barton is charming—so were several others to whom she introduced me. They are a noble band of women—prepared to bear all the odium and abuse and ridicule that may be lavished on their undertaking, for the sake of the good it may entail on those of their sex who need the help and sympathy of their stronger sisters. They will justify their action to the world before long, and those who have always decried us for being the first to hound down our own sex in times of trouble will find they have been mistaken, and that wronged or suffering women will find both affection and assistance from the members of the Pushahead Club."

Ronald Macnaughten could not help laughing, vexed as he was.

"My dear girl," he commenced, "you are utterly mistaken. The members of the Pushahead instituted their club, not for the protection of their sex but the gratification of their vanity. They are mostly women who have no interests of a better kind in this world. If they have relations to love them, they are idle, incapable women without work to do. If, on the other hand, there are, as you assert, great minds among them, depend upon it these great minds have no home love—no husband, no little children—to fill up their hearts and occupy the remnant of their time."

"But how does that concern me?" queried Lady Phyllis. "Naturally, at present, I know nothing of their characters, but I know they encourage and uphold women in the enjoyment of all lawful occupations and amusements; that their great aim is, to afford them the same choice of action as men, and which until now has been strenuously denied them; that they sympathize with them in following their own pursuits; that they consider they should have the same liberty as men——"

"And the same license?" interrupted her husband.

"Well, and why not?" asked Lady Phyllis.

"I shall see you coming home in knickerbockers and a crush hat some day," said Macnaughten, in a tone half of amusement, half of annoyance; but his wife took the remark seriously.

"I saw a young lady there this afternoon, who had just come in from cycling," she observed; "and she wore knickers and stockings and looked exceedingly nice in them."

"Oh! it is disgusting, abominable—a disgrace to the country!" exclaimed Macnaughten, as he commenced to pace the room. "It should be put down by act of Parliament. I don't know what men are thinking of to allow it, but, mark my words, Phyllis: if you go in for this sort of thing, it will part us."

She was about to say something angry in reply, when the butler fortunately saved the situation by throwing open the door and announcing dinner. The husband and wife had been so excited over their argument that they had not heard the second summons for dressing.

"I'm a respectable figure to walk into the dining room," said Macnaughten, as he paused before a mirror and passed his hand through his ruffled hair; "but it's all your fault. Mind, though; this subject is not finished. We will resume it after dinner. It must be settled once for all to-night."

The meal which succeeded was gloomy enough. Phyllis and Macnaughten sat opposite each other, with burning hearts and in almost total silence. Neither could eat, and the servants took dish after dish away untasted. Naturally, they perceived that "something was up" between their employers, but the Macnaughtens had one saving quality—they never carried on an argument or dispute in the presence of their domestics. They had too much respect for themselves. When the dessert was put on the table, Ronald said to Phyllis:

"How long will it take you to dress for this dance?"

To which she replied.

"I am not sure that I am going to it."

"Just like a woman!" he replied lightly. "Never know your mind for two minutes together. And yet you imagine yourself capable of organizing an institution—doubtless of governing a kingdom."

"Why not, when we have a woman on the throne?" inquired Phyllis.

"Pooh! only a nonentity—a lay figure dressed up to represent a queen, simply because the stupid old law of succession in the direct line has not yet been abolished."

"A lay figure, nevertheless, who has ruled the kingdom more wisely, and redressed the wrongs of the people more ably, than any of her male progenitors have done," retorted Phyllis.

"Well, I do not want to waste time over her Majesty's virtues," said Macnaughten, "but if you have quite finished your dinner, I should like to resume the discussion which Travers interrupted, and end it once for all."

"I am afraid you will find that a difficult matter, Ronald," said Phyllis, as she followed her husband to the library and ensconced herself in an armchair.

"You mean that you will not give in to my wishes—my orders?" he replied.

"Most certainly not; particularly if you put them in that manner," said his wife. "If I contemplated doing anything wrong, and you pointed out to me, as a friend, that it *was* wrong and convinced me of the justice of your assertion, I would give it up—but in a matter of mere choice, I do not recognize the expediency of taking your advice. To be a member of the Pushahead will interest and amuse me—at least I think so; should I find myself mistaken, I shall leave it again. But it is only fair that I should try the experiment, and I intend to do it."

"Phyllis!" said her husband, looking her full in the face, "I do not seem to know you."

"Have you ever *tried* to know me?" she replied. "In the days when we were engaged and so often together, with nothing to do but to learn each other's hearts and minds, did you ever once endeavor to find out what were my views on different subjects—whether my bias was toward politics, or religion, or amusement; did you ever think at that time of anything besides my hair, or my features, or my figure, or the amount of affection I displayed for you? Now, answer me honestly, *did you?*"

"I'm afraid I didn't. You see I loved you so."

"Bah, Ronald! don't deceive yourself; you cannot deceive me. Love is founded on something far better than that. Anyway it was for these things that you married me, and, while they last, you have no right to complain. When I have grown old and ugly, you can have a separation from me. Now, what more do you want?"

He was about to answer, but she went on.

"*Your own way!* Exactly! but in this instance you can't have it. I don't think, lax as the laws of England with respect to women are, that there is one which forbids a married woman from associating freely with members of her own sex, be they banded together in a club or not. You will only hurt yourself by arguing the matter any further, and annoy me, for my mind is fully made up on the subject."

"Oh, Phyllis! Phyllis!" exclaimed Macnaughten, in a voice of pain, "I thought you loved me."

"And so I do love you, you foolish fellow!" she

replied, but without attempting to approach him. "That is the mistake you men make. You imagine that a woman is to be nothing but love, without any will or wishes of her own. What has your love for me (if there is any of it left) to do with *your* clubs, or races, or smoking concerts? What a silly argument to use! Are we totally different natures, because we do not belong to the same sex? Sex has nothing whatever to do with temperament. I want my liberty as well as you."

"But I have never denied you anything, Phyllis; you know that; and I have done my best to make you happy."

"I know you have—in *your* way, but not in *mine!* And there is a great difference between the two. I can remember so well when we were honeymooning in Devonshire, and you went fishing in the Bay, how you insisted upon my accompanying you. You declared you could not live a few hours without me, and I was silly enough to believe you, and vain enough to be flattered by having made myself a necessity to you. So there I used to sit in the boat while you fished, nauseated to death, and terribly *ennuyée* with it all—yet you never perceived that I was either uncomfortable or bored. You had your fishing and me to talk to, and you were satisfied. *You* call that *Love*, and *I* call it unmitigated selfishness. That's just the difference in our opinion."

Macnaughten looked thoughtful for a minute before replying:

"Perhaps you are right. Perhaps we men *are* selfish in our passionate love for you women. Your beauties were made to attract our eyes, and we follow the instincts of our nature in indulging them."

"From what portion of Holy Writ do you draw your inference?" demanded Phyllis. "*Who* said we were made beautiful in order to attract men, since half the women in the world are hideous? And if so, what were *your* beauties made for if not to attract *us?* And yet, if a woman ever follows the instincts of *her* nature, she is called bold and unwomanly. Bah! you men have made all the laws of society for yourselves, and to suit yourselves, and have no authority for them but your own wishes."

"But this has nothing to do with our discussion, Phyllis. The question is: are you determined to go against my wishes in this matter, and make one of that abominable Pushahead Club?"

"I have already answered you—I am."

"A club where women so unsex themselves as to smoke and drink brandies and sodas, and dine out, and, for aught I know to the contrary, swear."

Lady Phyllis, recalling the incident of the lady cyclist, evaded the insinuation.

"And if they do, pray who taught them? The married women among them, at least, must be very dull if they have not picked up every vice under the sun by this time."

"You are going to discuss the sorts of topics that are freely handled in 'The Revolt of the Harem' and 'The Blue Orange,' I suppose. You intend to assist at debates on the laws of Heredity, and the question of Sex, and all the other nasty topics which ladies are so fond of splitting straws on, nowadays."

"Why not?" said Lady Phyllis. "If such things *are*, it is time I knew of them as well as other people."

Macnaughten gave a half groan as he perceived her obstinacy.

"Well, I told you before, and I warn you again, if you persevere in this unladylike intention of yours, it will, sooner or later, be the means of separating us."

"Can we get a separation on so slight a cause?" asked Phyllis, with apparent eagerness.

Her husband turned and regarded her reproachfully.

"Has it come to this, that you can jest on such a subject, Phyllis?"

Then she felt a little ashamed of herself, and attempted to turn it off as a joke.

"No, no, of course not! I was only laughing, but you are so terribly grave over the matter! I am sure, if we had been discussing the fate of the nation, you could not have been more horribly in earnest."

"This is a matter which affects me a great deal more than the fate of the nation would do, though you may not believe it," replied her husband. "It seems almost like

life and death to me ; but we have had enough of it for to-night, and will leave the decision to a future date. I confess it has made me feel good for nothing, and I am thankful you have given up the idea of going out this evening."

He passed his hand rather wearily over his brow as he spoke, and Lady Phyllis, thinking to make the *amende honorable*, rose from her seat and going to him essayed to kiss his forehead, but he put her away.

"No, Phyllis ! don't kiss me. We may differ in opinion, we may obstinately cling each to our own—we may become separated in everything but monetary interests ; but let us be honest with each other. Your kisses can mean nothing. Keep them for those who believe in them."

This was just the kind of speech to make Lady Phyllis too indignant for reply. She turned from her husband and swept out of the room in silence, and in another minute she was in her own apartment, sitting before the looking glass and having her wonderful coils of hair arranged in the latest fashion by the hands of the skillful Louise.

An hour later Mr. Macnaughten thought he heard a carriage come up to the front door and drive away again ; and after a while, feeling curious on the matter, he rung the library bell.

"Who was it called just now, James?"

"No one called, sir. It was the carriage going out with my lady."

"Has her ladyship gone already ?"

"Yes, sir. To Mrs. Taunton's, the order was. Did you want anything, sir ?"

"Yes. I will take my coffee here to-night."

He was too proud to let his servant see that his wife's absence was unexpected by him, for he had fully thought from her previous remarks that she intended to stay at home for the evening ; but he felt her starting without him, all the same. This was the beginning of her independence ; the beginning—who could tell—of their future separation in all social pursuits. It was the first

overt act of rebellion on Lady Phyllis' part, and her husband read the message aright. Neither old nor new books seemed to have the power to distract his thoughts from the subject that worried him, and after an hour's reverie over his pipe, he retired to bed and tried to lose sense of his troubles in sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST LINK BROKEN.

LADY PHYLLIS sent in her application to become a member of the Pushahead Club on the following day, and expected to wait a fortnight or more before she heard if she had been elected.

To her gratified surprise, however, she received an answer almost by return of post—an answer from the committee, conveying their satisfaction at her desire to join their forces, and asking her to accept the post left vacant by the death of Miss Moberley, the lion-slayer, and become their vice president. To have her vote and decision on matters of importance respecting the club would, they felt assured, greatly add to their weight and solidity.

Lady Phyllis felt much flattered by this proposal, and as if she had acquired an added dignity. To assist in making the laws for such an institution, in altering and amending them by her protestation or advice, to rule over the society in fact, though only vice-regally, made her heart flutter with the anticipation of unexpected greatness. She was very young, remember—only twenty-two—and she could not know that the members of the Pushahead Club wanted her name on their committee simply because she was a woman of birth and fashion, without a stain on her reputation; not even a name for crotchets and fads, like Lady Matthew Winterton; and that she had a certain influence in society, so that, where she led, others were pretty certain to follow.

She wrote back almost gratefully, decidedly enthusiastically, to accept the proposal made to her; and consequently, in a few days further, she received a formal notice of her election, with an intimation that she was

expected to take her seat as vice president on the occasion of the next committee meeting, which was to be held on a certain Thursday in the same month, at eleven o'clock in the morning.

She did not say anything to her husband about her new honors. She thought she had made it perfectly plain to him, on the occasion of their discussing the subject, that her mind was made up and she intended to cast in her lot with the ladies of the Pushahead.

The first unpleasantness that arose from this decision happened on the succeeding Thursday. It was her "At Home" day as usual, and when her room was half full of people her *bête noir*, Miss Vipan, was announced. Phyllis, who was talking to some gentlemen at the moment, Mr. Dalgairns being one of them, intended to dismiss the newcomer with a distant bow, but she did not know Miss Vipan. The little old maid, dressed just as she had been the time before, in a close straw bonnet and veil, looking as if she had stepped out of an almshouse into a drawing room, advanced to Lady Phyllis and extended her hand.

"Well, my dear!" she exclaimed, with offensive familiarity, "and so you are one of us? Glad to hear it! I congratulate you."

Lady Phyllis drew herself up with dignity, while her friends stared at the audacious little person before them.

"I do not understand you," ejaculated Phyllis freezingly.

"Why, aren't you elected a member of our club? I have heard a rumor that you are to take the place of our late vice president; but that is not common property yet. Didn't I tell you we should see a great deal of each other in the future? You'll find I'm generally right."

Lady Phyllis colored rosy red. She was not prepared to have her late innovation spoken of so openly, and she turned to the man who stood next her without deigning a reply to Miss Vipan's speech.

"I think you were telling me, Lord Charteris, of the sad death of this poor diver. Why will people be so foolhardy? I think Government should make it penal for anyone to risk his life for the amusement of the crowd."

"Oh, you're speaking of Sam Nowland, who killed him-

self diving from the Tower Bridge last night," interrupted Miss Vipan. "Yes, it was a mad thing to do, wasn't it? I warned him more than once. I told him how it would end, but he wouldn't listen to me."

"*You* warned him?" said Phyllis, forgetting her indignation in her surprise. "Did you know him then? Was he a gentleman?"

"A gentleman? Dear me, no! He was a fish porter, I believe, in Billingsgate. But I have seen him dive at the Alexandra Palace, and I foresaw the end. I can foresee the end of everybody when I've been in their company for ten minutes."

"Can you foresee your own end?" demanded Lord Percy Sefton, who was in attendance on his cousin as usual. He spoke in a childish, lisping voice, and his question appeared as innocent as himself. But it seemed to amuse the bystanders vastly, and it enraged Miss Vipan.

"I could tell you *yours*, truly enough," she said, fixing the young man with her keen eyes; "and it will not be a pleasant one, I can assure you."

"Oh, pray don't tell us anything unpleasant!" exclaimed Mr. Dalgairns, as he examined Miss Vipan through his eyeglass; "this world is quite troublesome enough as it is. Don't make it worse to bear by predictions of evil."

"But how *can* you tell, you know?" persisted Lord Percy. "Are you a witch?"

The little woman flashed her evil eyes upon him as she replied:

"I could tell you something that would settle you, young man, if you dared me to it. *Your* life will not be all roses, that is a certainty; and you're going the proper way now, if I am not mistaken, to land yourself in a bed of thorns."

"Well, I never knew that life *was* all roses," retorted Lord Percy, and Lady Phyllis, saying, "I think we have had enough of this," turned her attention wholly to Mr. Dalgairns.

"What is this that evil-looking little lady has been saying about you?" he demanded, in a low voice. "Surely

she was not speaking of the Pushahead Club when she said that you had become 'one of us'?"

Lady Phyllis looked slightly confused.

"Yes, she was. Why not?"

"It is not for me to say," he answered; "but I am sorry."

"So all you men declare when you hear that women have made a stand against you. What harm can the Pushahead Club do you? If you behave properly to the women under your care we shall have nothing to say against you, and if you do not, as you know in many instances is the case, it is only fair that our sex should have redress as well as yours."

"And do you really think," said Dalgairns, with an amused smile, which incensed Lady Phyllis, "that the members of the Pushahead will take any trouble, or incur any inconvenience, to defend or assist a woman who has fallen into difficulties? Do you imagine that they will act differently from any other women when the opportunity occurs to knock down social barriers and defy the world on behalf of their own sex."

"I am sure they will," she answered hotly. "For what other reason have they banded themselves together?"

"To defy the laws of society, to break down all the barriers of reserve—I was going to say decency—to allow themselves the same license as men; to make us out of love with women, in fact, and give us only cyclists, golfers, cricketers, and doctors for wives. We shall have to go to some uncivilized country for partners in another half century, for there will be none left for us here."

"I have no patience with you!" cried Phyllis, frowning. "You talk just like Ronald, as if women were idiots instead of reasonable creatures. Why, because some of us like open-air amusements and sports, should we all be the same? Are all men cricketers or football players? I have even known some who could sew with their needles, and enjoyed it. Why should we also not have a variety of tastes?"

"But—but—I hardly know how to put it—there is a great mixture among the members of the club in ques-

tion. Some of the ladies do not bear the best of reputations. You must forgive me for mentioning it, but I do not think that Macnaughten would quite like you to be intimate with some there. I am a barrister, you know, and hold a good many family secrets—if they are secrets."

"You might say the same of any large assembly in London," replied Lady Phyllis. "I am not sure that I could answer for everybody who comes to my house. But if there are wrongs to be righted there, I hope to have a hand in righting them. You may be sure I shall do my best, for I have been elected vice president of their committee."

Mr. Dalgairns looked as if he wished he had not spoken. His mouth dropped in a peculiar fashion, and he turned his head slightly away. In another moment he had said:

"Forgive me! I did not know matters had gone so far. I trust you may do a deal of good among them," and, turning on his heel, commenced to talk to another lady.

Lady Phyllis felt a little disconcerted. Not that she believed all that men said about the Pushahead. Of course, they tried to run it down; it was their *métier* to do so; still such remarks made her feel uncomfortable, and the sensation was not bettered by the entrance of Lady Alexander Fox, with a curate in her train.

This lady had truly, as Phyllis had heard, been concerned in one of the greatest scandals of modern times. Her name had been a byword for many months afterward, and she had never regained her place in society. So she had taken to what Macnaughten termed "the pious lay"—that is, in more eloquent language, she had affected to turn *dévote*, and went among the poor, and was heard of in connection with charitable concerts and prayer meetings. It was a clever way of throwing dust in the eyes which had not seen quite far enough. Many good-natured, unworldly people, who had not been of Lady Alexander's former set, and who did not read the papers regularly, began to say that they felt sure she was an injured woman—that she could not be as bad as was

said; else why should she spend her time in good works now? Did not the Rev. Ebenezer Howler thank her from the public platform the other day for the liberal subscription she made to the Christmas dinner for his poor people, and did not the Rev. Moses Suckling call her "the sister of the destitute" in his sermon? It was quite impossible that she could have done any of the awful things that those horrid press men imputed to her. They must have been bribed to take away the poor dear's character. And so Lady Alexander Fox, who had not been divorced only because Lord Alexander Fox *should* have been, wormed her way back into a certain sort of society—a half-and-half society, that considers a title on its visiting list covers a multitude of sins. She was to be seen at assemblies of the theatrical profession, at fancy balls, at parties given by rich merchants' wives, and at the aforementioned charitable meetings; but never at a private dinner given in a well-known house, or at the "At Homes" of the aristocracy. She held her own in such places as the Pushahead Club, but to all first-rate society she was a pariah, and the world knew it.

To have gained the acquaintance of Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, therefore, was a boon to Lady Alexander Fox, whose scandal had taken place so many years before that she hoped her new acquaintance might be too young to have heard of it. She was a ladylike woman in appearance and manners, with a very soft voice and expression; she was a beauty, too, or had been considered so when in society, and, to judge from the way in which he ogled her, the sucking parson by her side knew and appreciated the fact. But with all her bravery in defying the opinions of the world, Lady Phillis Macnaughten would rather Lady Alexander had waited for an invitation before invading her drawing room.

Of course she welcomed her—a lady is compelled to appear to welcome another in her own house—but her tone was timid and constrained.

"Ah, my dear Lady Phyllis!" commenced Lady Alexander plaintively, "I am sure you will forgive me for taking you so unceremoniously. I had no idea that Thursday was your reception day, and thought to find

you alone. I am so anxious to introduce to you—may I say to make you a friend of?—my friend the Rev. Onesimus Fowler." Then, in an aside, which Onesimus was fully intended to overhear: "Such a saint, dear Lady Phyllis!—*the* best man God ever made, a second apostle!" Aloud: "Mr. Fowler has been my friend and director and help in all things spiritual for some time past, so I felt assured you would not resent my presenting him to you. He is a great favorite also at *our* club, where, I trust, you will often meet him. By the way, I must congratulate you, and ourselves also, on the news which has just been circulated among us—that you are elected to be our new vice president. I am sure—we *all* are—that the choice of the committee could not have fallen upon a worthier object."

Lady Phyllis was trying to express her thanks suitably, when she was broken in upon by the voice of Miss Vipan.

"Ah, Lady Alexander, how are you? And you, Mr. Fowler? I see you've heard the great news—that this is our new vice president. I wouldn't own to it as a certainty just now, because I was not sure if Lady Phyllis had received the confirmation of her election; but I heard it all from Mrs. Smellwick. I suppose you've heard of Mrs. Smellwick?" she continued, turning to Phyllis.

"I do not think so. Who is she?"

"Not heard of Mrs. Smellwick, of the firm of Smellwick & Tanner, in Lombard Street! Why, she's the wife of the head of the firm; enormously rich, and one of the best dressed women in London. Isn't she, Lady Alexander?"

"But what has she to do with the club?" demanded Lady Phyllis.

"Why, she's one of our most influential members, and a very generous one into the bargain. She paid for all the bookshelves in the library and nearly half the books. I don't know what the Pushahead would do without Mrs. Smellwick."

"But Smellwick & Tanner, they are jewelers, or something of that sort, aren't they?" said Lady Phyllis ear-

nestly. "I didn't know they admitted tradesmen's wives, and people like that, to the Pushahead."

"Well, when they were organizing it, they were not able to be as particular as they would be now," interposed Lady Alexander gently. "The Pushahead is not yet perfect, you know, dear Lady Phyllis; but *you* will doubtless alter much of that. Your presence will draw a very different class of members to the club."

"You have more influential names than mine on your committee already," said Phyllis. "Lady Matthew Winterton is well known for the interest she takes in matters pertaining to her own sex."

"Yes," replied Lady Alexander, in a dubious tone, "but Lady Matthew is a faddist; quite a curiosity in some ways. Very good and all that, but her husband, Lord Matthew, can't live with her, you know, and I don't wonder at it. She is always preaching on a tub, or breakfasting in the back slums of London, or shaking hands with the ladies of the *pavé*, or some such extraordinary proceeding. Well-meaning, yes, very! but sadly mistaken. Not quite right here, you know"—touching her own forehead; "everybody says so. Very peculiar, very!"

"But it is very good of her to go among such disreputable persons," replied Lady Phyllis, glowing. "I should like her for it. It can be nothing but pure charity that instigates her actions. It must be so disagreeable to come into close contact with that sort of people!"

"Ah, Lady Phyllis!" exclaimed the curate, who had hitherto refrained from putting in his oar, "if you want to know what *real* charity is, you should follow our friend here"—with a touching glance at Lady Alexander—"in her various deeds of mercy. You should hear her sing at our concerts, pray at our meetings, wait upon our poor with her own hands."

"Hush, Mr. Fowler! Pray, do not make my poor endeavors to lighten your heavy labors the subject of conversation. I trust that, now Lady Phyllis Macnaughten and I are about to fight in the same cause, we may have many opportunities of discussing the best means by which to alleviate the sufferings of those less fortunately situated than ourselves."

Phyllis was about to reply when her husband entered the room. Mr. Macnaughten so seldom appeared at his wife's receptions that his entrance took her completely by surprise, and she was standing so near the door that it was impossible not to notice him.

"Ronald!" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of him, and thereupon Lady Alexander and Miss Vipan elevated their eyebrows, as though to inquire, "Who is this?" and she was obliged to introduce him to them.

Macnaughten's forehead gathered into the most ominous of frowns as the name of Lady Alexander Fox fell on his ear, but he was too much a gentleman to let his annoyance become apparent. He stood still for a minute, making the usual remarks about the weather, biting his lips the while and bowing with gravity, as Lady Phyllis mentioned each fresh name. Presently she said:

"It is quite a novelty to see you .grace my receptions, Ronald. Are we to take the compliment to ourselves?"

He forced a smile as he answered:

"Am I to tell a story, or to appear impolite? If you must know the truth I have just come from Dalgairns' chambers, and his man told me I should find him here. Have you seen him yet?"

"Oh, yes! I have been talking to him for the last half hour. I think you will find him in the conservatory. I saw him pass through to it with Lord Charteris."

"Thanks. I have something of importance to say to him. Excuse me," and, with another bow, Macnaughten left them.

"So that is Mr. Macnaughten!" exclaimed Lady Alexander. "I congratulate you, Lady Phyllis. I have always heard that you married one of the handsomest men in town, but I have never had the pleasure of meeting him before. He is indeed very good looking."

"Do you think so?" replied Phyllis, gazing after Ronald as if he were a stranger; "I know I used to make a great fuss over him in my 'green and sallet' days, but when one has been married four long years, you know"—with an expressive shrug of her shoulders.

"One is apt to think one's cousin, perhaps, better

looking than one's husband," said Miss Vipan, in a would-be facetious tone.

Lady Phyllis turned upon her quickly. "Are you speaking from your own experience?" she asked grandly.

"Hullo, Phyllis! do you think me better looking than Macnaughten?" demanded Lord Percy Sefton, who was still dangling near.

"Dear me, are *you* her cousin?" demanded Miss Vipan, determined to have her revenge. "I'm sure I didn't know it, or I might have thought twice before I spoke."

Lady Phyllis deigned no answer, but walked away abruptly to join another group of friends.

Meanwhile Macnaughten had sought the conservatory, where he found Mr. Dalgairns and Lord Charteris in earnest conversation.

"We were just talking of you," exclaimed the former; "where the dickens have you sprung from? I should as soon have dreamed of meeting the elephant from the Zoo in your wife's drawing room as yourself."

"I do not patronize her receptions as a rule, I confess," replied Macnaughten; "they are too much made up of tea and twaddle to suit my taste. But I have just come from your chambers, Dalgairns; and as your man said you had come here, I followed you."

"Anything of importance?" asked Dalgairns.

"Not particularly, but I wanted your advice on a matter which puzzles me. Nice lot here this afternoon, eh? The rooms seem filled with old women and—and—unmentionables."

"Since you have alluded to the subject, Macnaughten, let me ask you, does Lady Phyllis know the true character of the person she was talking with just now?"

"You mean Lady Alexander Fox?"

"Exactly. *You* remember the affair. It took place ten years ago, but that makes no difference. She is not a fit associate for your wife. I was astonished to see her here. However did she gain access to your house?"

"I have not yet ascertained, but it must be for the last time. Lady Phyllis is very young and unsophisticated, you know. She had never been in society before her marriage, and is very innocent in consequence. She

has not sufficient *nous* to compete with the women of the present day, who seem to have no sense of decorum, and worm their way, by hook or by crook, into houses where they would never have been admitted a few years ago. I saw the person you allude to, and I made a note of it. There will be a row, but I can't help that."

"That is the misfortune of belonging to a mixed club like the Pushahead. You can hardly forbid your house to the members of it, and she is one."

"Perhaps; but I have made up my mind that Lady Phyllis does not join the Pushahead. I know she wishes to do so, but her wishes must, in this case, succumb to mine. I intend to leave town rather earlier this season than usual, and I trust by next year she will have forgotten all about such folly."

Dalgairns had been about to reply, but perceiving that Macnaughten knew nothing of what Lady Phyllis had said to him, wisely held his tongue.

The afternoon waned, but Macnaughten had evidently no intention of waning with it, but kept his place in the conservatory, chatting with his friends, until the last cup of tea had been taken, the last farewell uttered, and even Lord Percy had torn himself away and quitted the room, now empty, save for the presence of the husband and wife.

Lady Phyllis was evidently nervous. She felt that Macnaughten's unusual presence betokened something more than a mere accident, and approached him, as he lounged on one of the benches in the conservatory, smoking a cigarette, with an air of timidity.

"Ronald," she commenced, "have you had any tea? Will you take a cup before it goes downstairs? It is quite fresh and hot."

"No, thanks; I never take tea after smoking, you know; besides I've been drinking *liqueur*. Tell James to go downstairs; I want to speak to you alone."

She dismissed the servant, without quitting her position, and as he disappeared with the last tea tray, she turned to her husband and said:

"Well, what is it?"

"Did you know that that woman, Lady Alexander Fox, was coming here to-day?"

"I did not," she answered truly.

"She had the audacity to visit you without an invitation?"

"Yes, if you can term a call from one lady to another by such a word."

"It is worse than audacity from such a woman as she is. You must stop it at once and forever, or you will lose every respectable acquaintance you possess. I saw old Mrs. Trendower looking at her the whole time you were in conversation. What made you talk with her in that familiar manner, as if you had known her for years? You should have put her in her place at once, and shown her what a liberty she had taken in bombarding us in this manner."

"I cannot be rude to a visitor in my own house. That may be *your* idea of politeness, but it is not mine."

"A woman of that stamp does not merit politeness. However, the thing has to be done. I cannot allow her to visit you, and you must write and tell her so."

"Oh, Ronald! I cannot."

"There is no alternative, If you do not, she will present herself here every Thursday. Lay the blame on me, if you like; but let her distinctly understand that I forbid the acquaintance. It is very awkward, I allow, but she has brought it on herself. She has no right to intrude on the notice of any decent woman."

"But it is *impossible!*" gasped Phyllis. "She is a member of the Pushahead, and I cannot shut my doors to any one of them. If Lady Alexander were not recognized in society now, Lady Barton would not have put her on the committee of the club, surely."

"Recognized! Rubbish! She is recognized by such half-and-half nobodies as think a great deal of a title, however stained and battered, but she is not fit company for you, and she never darkens these doors again."

"You said much the same of Lady Fearon, but she has been here since then and shall do so, as often as ever she chooses."

"You are determined to oppose me in such matters, Phyllis, I see," replied Macnaughten sadly, "but you must draw the line somewhere. Lady Fearon (though

I don't like her as a friend of yours) is a lamb of innocence, compared to Lady Alexander Fox. *She* ran away with her lover from her husband—that was bad enough; still, Sir Richard married her, and society has in a measure condoned the offense. But this last is a woman whom no man *would* marry—who made herself notorious with so many that she was fit for none—and I utterly forbid you to know her. Now, let us have no argument on the matter. Once and for all, she does not enter these doors again. If you will not write and tell her so, I shall do so myself."

Lady Phyllis was infinitely distressed.

"But it is impossible—impossible!" she reiterated; "such an affront was never heard of before. I should never be able to enter the club again."

"All the better!" said Macnaughten. "I told you plainly the other evening what I thought about the Pushahead, and that you should never belong to it with my sanction. In fact, I don't intend that you shall belong to it; therefore you will be under no necessity to receive any of the members."

"You speak too late," said Phyllis, determined to brave the matter out. "I told you at the time you allude to that my mind was made up, and so it was. I received a proposal on the following day to become the vice president of the Pushahead, and I accepted the offer and was duly elected. So you see it is done, and cannot be undone!"

Macnaughten flew into a passion at this news.

"It *can* be undone, and it *shall*," he cried, "if I go myself to the club, and appeal against their ridiculous election. And if you don't give in to my decision with a good grace, I will take you away to Roxburgh to-morrow, and keep you there till you have come to your senses."

This was the kind of argument that roused Lady Phyllis' most determined opposition. This was the sort of tyranny that husbands exercised over their wives. It was never "will you" or "will you not"; but "*I* insist," or "*I* have determined." Well, *she* was determined also. She would *not* give in where she felt that she was right.

"It is all "shall" and "will" with you men," she said scornfully. "But you will find that women can make resolutions as well as yourselves. I will *not* give up the vice presidentship of the Pushahead Club, and I will *not* insult Lady Alexander Fox. I will not be like other women, who are too cowardly to stick up for their own sex, who have gone wrong perhaps from an exercise on the part of men of the very tyranny which I resent in you at the present moment. And if you carry your brute force so far as to take me away from London in the middle of the season, just because I choose to assert my freedom of action and will not submit to be treated like a baby, I shall appeal to my father against your treatment of me. It is shameful—disgraceful—iniquitous that a man should be allowed to make such a slave of his wife, and for no worse fault than claiming the right to exercise her own judgment in matters that concern only herself."

And Phyllis finished up her peroration by weeping quietly behind the shelter of her handkerchief. The sight of her tears mollified the rage of her husband. He had so seldom seen her weep, during their happy married life.

"Don't do that, please!" he said wearily. "You have no right to speak of my action in this matter as cruel or brutal. My only wish has been to save you from yourself and those who would take advantage of your ignorance. But you defy me. You say you will have your own way. You *will* make one of this band of women, whom you know I detest—you will fill my house with disreputable characters and admit them to your friendship. And you say it is impossible to remedy it, and that you are determined it shall go on. Well, then, I will contend with you no longer. You shall not have it in your power to say that I have shown myself to be brutal like other husbands—you shall have your own way for the future. Only, you must not expect me to share it. You must forgive me if I decline to associate with people whom I dislike, or stay to see my house—the house which my mother graced for so many years and filled with gentlewomen as pure and unspotted as

herself—taken possession of by ladies whose acquaintance is a disgrace to us both. Henceforth, then, go your own way ; know your own people ; do as you choose—but do not expect me to be your companion. I shall not withdraw my protection from you. The house is wide enough for us both, but I shall prefer to live as much alone as possible while we are indoors, though, for decency's sake, I shall still accompany you to places of public amusement. We must not make the world talk about us more than we can help. You understand me, do you not?"

"Oh, yes! I perfectly understand you."

"Very well then, I have nothing more to say. You will not be surprised if you miss me from your dinner and breakfast table. There is so little sympathy between us that my absence will doubtless be preferable to my company. And then I shall not be subject to hear where you have been or whom you have seen and thus be spared much annoyance."

"And so shall I," said Lady Phyllis boldly.

Macnaughten rose from his seat and approached the door.

"I suppose it will not be considered necessary in the future for us to give each other any intimation of leaving the house, but as this is the first evening and old habits are difficult to break, I may as well say that I am going out to dine with a friend and shall not be home till late. I will give Travers all necessary directions concerning my own comfort, so you need not trouble about me. Good-night."

And without glancing at his wife again, he left the room. She stood where he had left her, trying to persuade herself that she had gained the victory and was very glad of it—at the same time a little confused and agitated as she tried to remember distinctly the terms of the new contract between Ronald and herself. She heard him mount the stairs to the nursery to kiss little Roy, before he left the house, and she heard him come down again, and hold a colloquy with Travers, the butler, and then a hansom was whistled for, and apparently Ronald got into it and drove away. After a while, hear-

ing no sounds about the house, she crept from the drawing room, and encountered James upon the stairs on his way to light the lamps.

"Was that your master who drove away just now, James?" she inquired.

"Yes, my lady. He won't be home to dinner to-night, my lady. Will your ladyship please to want the carriage this evening?"

"No, thank you, James."

My lady mounted the stairs very slowly after that, and entered her bedroom. She peeped into her husband's dressing room, which was next to it. A housemaid was already busy there, making up the bed for the night. She courtesied as her mistress appeared.

"Mr. Travers said as the master would be late to-night, my lady, and wished this bed got ready for him, lest he should disturb you, my lady, if you please."

"Oh, yes, Sarah! it is all right."

A heavy tramping overhead betokened that Master Roy was enjoying himself by playing horses, or circus, or some other animated game with Susan, the nursemaid. Chairs were being dragged over the floor tied together with skipping ropes—loud halloos resounded through the apartment and lashings of whips, as Roy drove his gallant team over the nursery carpet. Lady Phyllis looked at her watch. It wanted half an hour of her dinner time. She rang the nursery bell.

"Tell Susan to bring Master Roy down to me, Reynolds," she said, as the nurse appeared in answer. "I wish to see him before dinner."

"Certainly my lady," replied the servant; "but he's having a fine romp. I don't know how he'll like being disturbed."

"Nonsense!" said her ladyship rather crossly. "Send him down at once!"

Reynolds had certainly been right—there was evidently much persuasion on her part, and more remonstrance on that of Master Macnaughten, before he could be induced to break off acting Buffalo Bill and visit his mamma's bedroom. When at last he appeared at the open door, it

was with a sulky thumb stuck in his mouth, and a decidedly rebellious expression of countenance.

"Come here, Roy! I want you," said Phyllis. "I haven't seen my little boy all day."

"Want to play," replied Roy, holding back.

"Oh, fie! Master Roy, go to your mamma directly, like a good boy," said Reynolds.

"Aint a good boy!" remonstrated the child.

"No, I think you're very naughty," responded Phyllis tartly, "but you haven't seen what mamma has in her dressing-table drawer, all the same."

The child rushed forward to get the jujubes which Phyllis kept for him there, and having received them, turned to his nurse and said:

"Got 'em. Now, take me up to Susan again."

"What am I to do, my lady?" asked Reynolds.

"Oh, take him away, *I* don't want him. He's like all his sex—he loves you only for what he can get out of you."

The old nurse laughed, as if her mistress had said a very funny thing, and beat a retreat with her little charge.

And when they had disappeared Lady Phyllis did what was very natural for a woman to do, after so much excitement and annoyance—she laid her head down on the dressing table and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN AUSTIN'S RESOLUTION.

CAPTAIN JOHN AUSTIN'S regiment was quartered at Woolwich, which gave that gentleman the privilege of running up to town as often as he chose. He had been introduced to Mrs. Bernard at the house of one of the married officers of the colonel's late corps ; had taken a fancy for her; had met her frequently since, at first by pure accident, afterward by mutual hints where they were likely to be found—latterly, by direct assignation. And yet, at the onset, these two young people had been quite guiltless of intentional wrong. They thought only of amusing themselves. I am aware this assertion will be met with much incredulity by the members of the *beau sexe.* Young women with leaden-colored lips and sandy hair—old young women with salt cellars and an artificial "bun"—old women with gray wigs and a stomach, will all cry out that it is impossible that a girl like Cissy could meet a young man by appointment time after time, and not know what was coming. Do they then speak from their own experience, or their knowledge of the world ?

Probably they imagine that the work of the Divorce Court is furnished by romances as thrilling as any concocted by an imaginative author of seventeen. They think the heavy villain of the drama lies in wait for his victim months before he has ruined her; that he has made his crafty plans years before; that he dreams of evil, and swears she shall be his, until the fatal moment arrives.

The heroine, also, sees the doom coming upon her in the distance, and struggles and prays against it, until she can struggle no longer and weakly falls into the trap

laid for her, after which the verdict of that pure, ingenuous, and undefiled society which rules the world comes down upon her like an extinguisher; the Divorce Court sits upon her and condemns, and the world knows her no more.

How surprised these good people—whom no wicked lover can ever possibly have taken the trouble to initiate in these mysteries—would be if they could analyze the real cause of half the divorce cases that take place; how different they would find them to be from their belief. The majority of men and women are *pushed* into the situation, often sorely against their better judgment and their will.

These cases always begin with unhappiness or neglect at home. They *must* begin with neglect, for if a husband looked properly after his wife, and made her his companion, such things could not possibly have the opportunity to occur. The woman is left to her own devices then, or she is unhappy. As often as not her husband is unfaithful to her first, and she labors under a sense of injustice and an impotent desire for revenge. The laws of England, which accord so many more privileges to the man than the woman, are responsible for much of the business of the Divorce Court, and increase the crimes they were passed to prevent. An unhappy or disappointed woman soon finds sympathizers among the other sex, especially if she be pretty or interesting, and you will generally find that *divorcées* are pretty or interesting.

The ladies who rail against them are generally such as any man might leave with perfect impunity for a seven years' separation with the certainty of finding them just as he left them on his return. These are mostly women's women—that is, the favorites and *confidantes* of their own sex, and have much to thank God for, in that they are so little molested or subjected to temptation.

But the other sort, the men's women, have a harder battle to fight. Men court their society; they appear at their houses as often as they possibly can; they offer them flowers and books and theater tickets, and such like tokens of their good intentions. The woman, perhaps,

prefers one of them to his fellows, she makes a friend of him, they interchange confidences, and after a while the history of her little trouble comes out. Sympathy is a very dangerous thing between a man and a woman under thirty; nevertheless, this particular pair has no thought of doing wrong; she never dreams of such a thing, and it has only flashed across his mind at intervals, when one day

> "Alas! how easily things go wrong!
> A sigh too much, or a kiss too long—
> And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
> And life is never the same again!"

The *dénouement* in these cases generally comes unexpectedly—as a shock, a surprise, a revelation—something to be looked back upon with shame and horror, and then the tears are dried, the forgiveness extended, the agitation calmed—they are friends again and—they walk eventually into the Divorce Court together. And why? Because sympathy and friendship and affection are so rarely accorded to woman by her own sex. She has to go further afield for them, and the flowery paths are dangerous for the unhappy and the neglected to traverse.

Very few men and women are designedly wicked in this world, but many are undesignedly thoughtless of consequences. And so might the young lady with the leaden-colored lips, the old-young lady with the salt cellars, and the old lady with the stomach have all been—had anyone asked them to walk that way.

Jack Austin was as good and honorable as most young men, and with a very kind heart. But that he had any particular designs upon Cissy's virtue is untrue. He was sitting at breakfast in his Woolwich quarters one morning about this time, in company with two brother officers, when the topic was introduced, and his words spoke for themselves. His soldier servant had just brought in the London letters, and seeing a pink envelope inscribed with Cissy's school-girlish writing, Jack Austin quietly put it on one side, intending to keep it for future perusal. But it did not escape the lynx eyes of Barrington, one of his companions.

"Hullo, Jack!" he exclaimed; "who's your friend? Out with it, man! I saw the handwriting, so no shuffling!"

"There is no need to shuffle, Tom," replied Austin, "though, if I intended to keep my friend's name to myself, none of your bullying would get it out of me. But, as it happens, this is quite square and aboveboard. Aren't you disappointed?"

"He thought he'd caught you at last," remarked Quinton, Austin's other chum. "Barrington's never happy unless he's grubbing up a mare's nest about some woman or other."

"Well, if it's all square, why can't we hear who she is?" said Barrington. "I've seen that writing and that pink paper more than once before on your table, Austin! Who is it from?"

"It's like your d—— impudence to ask," replied Austin, smiling, "but I will gratify your curiosity for this once. The letter is from Mrs. Bernard—old Bernard's wife."

"A married woman!" cried Barrington, "and he calls it all square and aboveboard!"

"So it is," said Jack rather indignantly; "and to prove my words I'll open this letter and read it aloud, though I've not the least idea what it may contain."

Suiting the action to the word, Captain Austin tore open Cissy's note and read as follows:

"DEAR CAPTAIN AUSTIN:

"I can't go to the concert, thank you, as it would be too early for me to leave home—my husband does not go to his club till two—but I am going to Whiteley's to-morrow afternoon, shopping, so, if you are our way, perhaps we may meet there.

"CISSY."

"Well, I don't think you can make much out of that!" said Austin, as he replaced the little pink sheet in its envelope.

"Ah! we haven't got the key by which to interpret it," said Barrington, laughing. "It may be written in cipher for all we know."

"No, indeed; honor bright, boys! You know as much as I do. The fact is, I feel heartily sorry for this poor little girl. That beast, Bernard, is leading her a dog's life. She dare hardly say her soul's her own, and is kept a perfect prisoner in the house while he goes swaggering about his club and his houses of call."

"I'd pity any woman in the clutches of that old brute Bernard. How they did hate him in the Martineers! There's hardly a man of them will take him by the hand now."

"I should think not! Why, he *had* to sell out, or he would have been turned out after that affair with Major Blacklock's wife. A nice sort of an 'officer and a gentleman' to go sneaking after his brother officers' wives! He should have been drummed out of the regiment and then shot!" said Quinton.

"What sort of a woman is his wife, Austin?"

"Oh, a poor little frightened creature about twenty, quite a child. He bullies her morning, noon, and night. She never has any pleasure, and so sometimes I have taken her to an afternoon 'show.' But it is rather risky, you know, for we might meet the old brute at any turn, and he'd never believe we were only friends and nothing more!"

"Rather not!" said Quinton seriously. "I say, Austin, old chap, it would be a sell for you if you found yourself saddled with a woman you didn't want. Be careful, old fellow! Don't be led away by sympathy and pity, and all that rot, to make a fool of yourself. It would mean selling out, you know. You could never bring her here."

"My dear boy, what *are* you driving at? Do you think I'm a 'Lutherian'? Why, I wouldn't harm a hair of the little woman's head. She looks like a school-girl, and is not much more companionable. The silliest little duffer you ever came across. But it *is* a shame, by Jove! to treat her as he does. He never takes her anywhere, unless I send her a couple of theater tickets, and then, for his own sake, he will go too. But she leads the dullest life you can imagine, while he goes on just as he did when a bachelor. I'm always thinking of something

to amuse her. That is the meaning of this note. I asked her if she could go to the Philharmonic with me on Friday, and I'm sure that's innocent enough."

"Oh, yes, my boy, but it's where it leads—it's where it leads," said Barrington.

"Well, this won't lead anywhere but into a cab to take her home again, so you need not disturb yourself about my precious morals, Tom. I don't profess to be better than my neighbors, but I never deliberately seduced another man's wife yet, and I don't mean to try."

"But she might seduce *you!*" argued the practical Quinton. "It's generally the woman's fault in these cases, Jack. *We* should keep straight enough if they'd let us."

"You need not have any fears on that account either, Quinton. Mrs. Bernard is not at all that sort of woman. She is a child, in utter dread of her master, and yet just daring enough to run and skip and play when his back is turned. If you saw her, with her curly little head and her shy dark eyes, and her childish way of talking, you would soon change your opinion."

"Why, these innocent creatures who don't know right from wrong, and do the most outrageous things from sheer ignorance, are the very ones to lead a man into a scrape!" exclaimed Tom Barrington. "My dear fellow, do be careful of what you're about, for goodness' sake! or you will be landed in the Divorce Court before you know where you are."

Captain Austin indignantly refuted his friend's suggestions. Mrs. Bernard was no more to him than a friend; he had not gone about with her more than most men did with most women; had taken tea with her once or twice at a ladies' club, where a hundred pairs of eyes were on them all the while; had taken her out to one or two luncheons at the Holborn, had been with her to a few *matinées;* what were these but the ordinary attentions paid by men in society to the wives or sisters of their friends? If Colonel Bernard heard of them, he was heartily welcome to do so, he could prove nothing against him, bluster as he might, for the very good reason that there was nothing to prove. But though he so emphatically denied the least intention of wrong

toward Cissy Bernard, the cautions of his chum made Captain Austin think more seriously of his intimacy with her than he had ever done before. Sometimes the very mentioning of such things in public will fan the smoldering embers into a flame. Feelings may lie hidden and unrecognized for a long time, in the depths of our own hearts, but when they are rudely stirred up and analyzed or commented upon, we find, to our amazement, that they are quite different from what we had imagined them to be.

Jack Austin sat thoughtfully in his chair, for some time after his friends had quitted the breakfast table, asking himself if it really could be true that he felt more for Cissy Bernard than he had believed to be the case. And did she care for him? He kept on recalling certain little incidents, looks, and expressions which she had used, which seemed to throw an entirely new light upon their intercourse, and made him fear lest he should have let their friendship go too far, and made himself necessary to her. If that were so, it must be put a stop to, at whatever cost to both of them. He could not answer her letter, as she was never sure of the colonel not getting hold of her correspondence and opening it *sans cérémonie.* So hers usually contained the news where he could find her, and he was his own letter carrier. To-morrow at Whiteley's. Yes, he must go to Whiteley's, he decided; and take the poor little woman to some quiet place and break to her the news that they must be more cautious about meeting in future. Jack Austin twirled his mustache a good deal as he was coming to this resolution. He did not like the thought of telling Cissy she must relinquish her sole amusement, at all; he did not like the idea of relinquishing it himself. He had become used to seeing her on his frequent journeys to town, he liked to watch the look of gratitude with which she received his proposal to take her to some place of amusement; to think that he infused pleasure, though forbidden (but are not forbidden pleasures always the sweetest), into her colorless life. And it had all been so innocent hitherto; why could people not leave them alone to enjoy themselves as best they might?

He began questioning himself; a thing he had never dreamed of doing before; if, supposing what Barrington had hinted at came to pass, and his intimacy with Mrs. Bernard led him into a scrape, he should be prepared—not to marry her; *that* he should do of course, no man of honor could do less—but to live happily as her husband. The answer was "yes." The idea was a new one; it inflamed his fancy, he did not stop to consider anything but the prospect of possessing her; in fact, he behaved as most men do when they desire a woman, either as wife or mistress, and never took the question of her suitability in mind or feeling into consideration at all. All the same he saw what an insane thing it would be for him to do; it would be the end of his military career, of his family friendships, and of their mutual social standing. Of course, it was ridiculous to think of it. It would ruin his prospects, break his mother's heart—and be a sore injustice to the little woman herself. She was quite old enough to understand his motives, and clever enough to see the reason of them; so he should go and meet her at Whiteley's, broach the matter as gently as possible, point out to her the rashness of which they had been guilty, and persuade her to give him his *congé*.

Accordingly, Captain Austin was lingering outside Whiteley's establishment on the following afternoon, and about four o'clock saw Cissy Bernard tripping up the Grove, looking like a dainty flower in her summer draperies. But when she drew nearer and they had exchanged greetings, Austin observed that she was paler than usual, and her eyes showed traces of recent tears. Her manner also was fluttered and agitated, and the way she slipped her little hand through his arm showed that she clung to him for succor and protection.

He looked at her for a minute and then said:

"Is anything more than usual the matter, Mrs. Bernard?"

"*Everything* is the matter," replied Cissy, in a manner that made him think the colonel had discovered their intimacy. He gave a low whistle, as he remarked:

"Now, look here; do you *really* want to shop at Whiteley's, or was it merely a rendezvous?"

"Of course it was. I thought it the safest place that we could meet at."

"Then I shall take you to Verey's instead. There, we can have an inner room and talk in peace. I see you have something of importance to tell me, and Whiteley's is no place for privacy."

He hailed a passing hansom, and putting Cissy into it, directed the driver to take them to Verey's in Regent Street.

The drivers of hansoms must know about as much of the goings-on of ladies and gentlemen in London as anybody. The number of pairs of engaged, or friendly, or promiscuous couples they take to Simpson's or Verey's, or the Criterion or the Holborn, in the course of a day, must be problematical. No need for them to try and guess if their fares be respectable married people, or not. The lover flings them his small change recklessly, that he may get his fair charge under shelter as soon as possible; the husband counts out his, with a beautiful indifference as to whether madame stands waiting on the pavement for one minute or ten.

Captain Austin did not keep his cabby over an argument concerning his fare, but dismissed him in so lordly a manner as to make him observe, as he drove away, that "'e was a real gennelman, 'e was."

Cissy and her friend, seated on a sofa in the inner room at Verey's, provided with cups of chocolate and cakes, were free to talk to each other in peace.

"And now," he said, as he turned to her, "tell me all about it. Has he found out that we meet each other sometimes?"

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Cissy, with wide-opened, questioning eyes; "if he once does that, all my pleasure in life will be gone."

Jack squeezed her little hand under the table, as he proceeded:

"Then what can it be? I am sure there has been a row. I can see you have been crying, by your eyes."

"The most horrible thing has happened that you ever heard of," commenced Cissy solemnly. "He has killed

my poor cat. He hung her in the back yard," and her eyes filled with tears again at the recollection.

"What a *beast* he is!" exclaimed Austin emphatically. "He seems to have no feeling for anything or anybody. What on earth had the poor brute done? And it was a pet of yours, too?"

"Yes, it was the only thing I had to care for and look after. Oh! it was done to spite me, there's no doubt of that. The fact is, he has found out that I belong to the Pushahead Club. I can't imagine who told him, unless it was that horrid Miss Vipan. I trembled when I heard him say he had met her at the Nettlefolds' last week, though how she came to know them, I cannot imagine. But she is ubiquitous. You see her everywhere."

"Do you mean that faded, shriveled-up little woman with a peculiar style of dress, who spoke to you once at the club when I was taking tea there? I remember her perfectly; but if she told the colonel of your belonging to the club, she may have mentioned my presence there, also." And Jack Austin experienced a strange feeling, half of fear and half of anticipation, at the probability.

"Oh, no! I should have been sure to hear it if she had. But I have been trembling ever since. What *should* I do, if I lost you for a friend? You are the only friend I have," she said, with a plaintive smile, "except Lady Phyllis Macnaughten."

Jack squeezed her hand again, in token of his fidelity.

"You shall not lose me, Cissy—I *may* call you 'Cissy,' mayn't I?"

"Oh, yes, do! I *love* it," interpolated Cissy.

"You shall never lose me so long as it is your wish to keep me; not for a thousand colonels. We are not doing any harm; why should we have any fear?

"But if he found it out, he would never, *never* let me see you again."

"Oh, we would find some way to circumvent him, never fear! If he is so cruel to you, you should consult a solicitor on the subject. Perhaps you could get a separation from him; then I should be able to come and see you every day. Wouldn't that be nice?"

But Mrs Bernard shook her head.

"I should never *dare* try for a separation," she said; "for if I didn't get it, he would kill me. Besides, fancy going to a lawyer all by myself! I shouldn't know what to say to him, and perhaps he would repeat it to the colonel. Oh, I shouldn't dare!"

Captain Austin shrugged his shoulders with a pitying smile. This fragility and helplessness appealed strongly to his manly nature, but it was sorry stuff to fight the battles of the world with.

"But tell me about this trouble," he continued presently. "How came he to be so cruel to the poor unoffending cat?"

"Well, the beginning was that someone told him yesterday that they had met me at the Pushahead, and that I was a member of the clnb. He came home to dinner furious, and accused me of it. Jack—may I call you 'Jack' too?"

"Of course you may, dear! I should be very sorry if you called me anything else."

"*Dear* Jack!" said Cissy caressingly, smoothing the cuff of his coat with her hand. "He took me so much by surprise that, at first, I really didn't know what to answer; but he insisted on a reply, so I said it was true. I couldn't think of anything else to say at the moment."

"It would have been no use if you had. He would have been sure to find out it was a fib afterward, and been all the more angry with you. Honesty is always the best policy, Cissy. And what then?"

"He swore frightfully, and stormed about the room, and declared that I had deceived him, and I should never leave the house again, and he would have me locked up for a madwoman, and all that sort of thing, you know; but he never asked me who paid the entrance fees for me. I suppose he forgot it for the time being."

Jack Austin looked alarmed. "Mind you don't let out that *I* did it," he said earnestly. "I say it for *your* sake, darling; but swear to anything but that. It would look so bad, though you and I know there was no harm in one friend helping another in such a case. But you had better

say you found the money lying about, or took it out of his trousers pocket, than say it was I."

Mrs. Bernard smiled in her cunning little way, while her eyes twinkled.

"Trust *me*, Jack," she answered; "I will never do that, if he tears me limb from limb. He very nearly did. We had a most miserable evening, but I was very obstinate and would tell him nothing, excepting that I had a right to belong to the club if I liked, and I had done no wrong. He is rather afraid of making too much noise now, you know, Jack, because he doesn't want Jane, the housemaid, to hear him. Jane is quite a friend of mine, and the other night, when he struck me, I went upstairs and slept with her."

At this announcement, Captain Austin's face expressed the horror which he felt.

"*Struck you!* Do you mean to tell me that he actually struck you a blow? That big brute, and a weak, delicate little creature like you! Cissy, you are not in earnest! He never dared to strike you?"

"Indeed he did, then. He boxed me on the ears till my head swam; but Jane heard it, and it frightened him. He is an awful coward, you know. He is quite afraid of Jane now, I think. So, after he had been rowing me, I went up to her room again to sleep with her, for I am *really* afraid of him, you know, Jack," continued Cissy, with big appealing eyes, moist with unshed tears; "but he came upstairs and kicked the door in with his foot, and pulled me out of bed and took me downstairs again. And Jane called him all the names she could think of, and said she would summons him for breaking into her bedroom when the door was locked, and oh, there *was* such a row!"

"My poor little girl! It makes my blood boil to think of you left to the tender mercies of such a brute."

"But I wouldn't get into bed," said Cissy, shaking her curly head, "and Jane stayed outside the bedroom door all night, so that he dared not strike me again. And I sat on the sofa till morning, while he snored comfortably; and then he was obliged to open the door and let me free."

"But how about the cat?"

"Oh, I am coming to that! At breakfast he began again about the club, and it suddenly struck him to ask where I got the fees, so I said I had saved it from my housekeeping money, which you know was a dreadful fib, but what *could* I say? It could hardly have been worse, though, if I had told him the truth. He declared *that* was the reason then that he had such bad dinners. I spent his money on my own debaucheries—yes, that was the word he used, Jack, *debaucheries*—and gave him cat's meat to eat, while I ran about town and neglected my duty, which is to spend all he gives me on housekeeping, and stay at home to see the meat is properly prepared. Just at that moment, my poor little pussy came up and rubbed herself against his leg, and—and"—Cissy could hardly get out this part of her narration without bursting into tears—"he kicked the poor thing right out of the room and down the stairs, and when I called out that he was cruel, and the cat had done no wrong, he ran down into the lobby for a piece of rope, and he—he—hung my—my poor little kitty up to the clothes line in the back garden. And—and," added Cissy convulsively, while she bit her lips hard to prevent her tears flowing, "I—I, loved her so!"

Jack Austin was so indignant he could hardly speak. Had he done as his inclination prompted him, he would have asked the girl beside him to cut at once and forever the chains that bound her to such a cowardly ruffian, and trust the rest of her life to him. And had he done so, Cissy would doubtless have consented, for she was very young and imprudent; she was also very much disappointed with life as she had found it, and in search of excitement; but Austin's better feelings prevailed. The cautions of his chums also were still ringing in his ears, and he stamped upon the feeling which would have made him gratify his desire to protect Cissy from brutality at the expense of her fair fame; so he stooped down to her side instead, and whispered:

"Dear Cissy, don't cry! Try not to think of it any more. Can't *I* fill up the void left by poor pussy's death? You have *me* still, you know, and I am ready to

take all the petting you will give me ; and I don't think the colonel will find it an easy matter to hang *me*, whatever I may be guilty of."

Cissy peeped from beneath her long wet lashes and smiled. It was good to hear him speak in this strain, as if he really belonged to her, and would be her friend to her life's end. She did more than look at him, she slipped her hand in his again, and murmured :

"Oh, you don't know what a comfort you are to me."

"And now," said Austin, when she was more composed, "cannot we think of some means by which we can circumvent this old bully, Cissy ? I'm not going to have you kept in the house, without amusements or friends, to gratify his spite, while he goes about on his own account. Does he never spend an evening from home ?"

"Very seldom—but, stay, he has an engagement next week to go down to Portsmouth and see some of his old friends. Wednesday, he said he should go there, and return on Thursday evening. We will have a jolly long walk together, Jack, on Wednesday afternoon, if you have no other engagement ; won't we ?"

"Both afternoon and evening," replied Austin ; "we'll make a day of it, Cissy. It's not often we get such an opportunity. Let me see. The programme shall be like this: A drive into the country in the afternoon—dinner at the Cri; a theater in the evening—supper at Simpson's afterward, and so back to your prison in Moseley Gardens. Will that suit, eh ?" Cissy's eyes sparkled with anticipated pleasure—her little frame was trembling with excitement ; her hands were clasped nervously.

"Oh, oh !" she gasped, "won't it be delightful ! I shall count the minutes till Wednesday. But suppose he shouldn't go. What a terrible disappointment ! It would kill me. Oh, Jack, Jack! you have made me so happy."

She was like a child who sees a Twelfth Cake displayed to view, or its first Pantomime—or any other creature who is almost too excited to speak. She betrayed so unreservedly the dull, unnatural life she had been leading since her marriage that Austin longed to kiss away

the tears that still stood trembling, like dewdrops on a roseleaf, on her pretty cheeks. But with an effort he restrained himself, and telling her playfully not to be a little goose and they would have plenty such days before they had done with them, he conveyed her back to the house, which was, by courtesy, termed her home.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LADIES' COMMITTEE.

THE Committee Room at the Pushahead Club was a very handsome apartment. It was long and lofty, and lighted by a sky-light. The table was of oak, covered with stamped leather, and the chairs to match were upholstered in green morocco. There was an air of solidity and massiveness about the arrangements of the room which seemed to spell business. At the head of the table were two armchairs for the president and vice president ; at the foot was the secretary's desk.

The chairs for the ladies of the committee were ranged around the table, on which was an ample supply of pens, ink, and paper.

On the walls of the apartment, which were tinted a dull cream, hung some half dozen oil paintings, representing subjects of history, and an oaken bookshelf at the further end of the room contained books of reference on legal and other questions likely to be required by the important assembly. In this room the ladies of the committee met once a month, to decide the weighty matters connected with the club—to carry or reject the motions which were laid upon the table—to decide by ballot the applications sent in for membership—to examine into the monthly expenses, and to balance the accounts. Quite enough business to occupy them, one would think, without talking, but there was a great deal of chattering among them, nevertheless, and plenty of scandal was in active circulation in the course of the day. Luncheon was served at one of the restaurant tables for the committee, if their affairs were not concluded by that time ; and they were shut up again afterward, like jurors on a trial, until they had arrived at a satisfactory decision.

On the morning that Lady Phyllis Macnaughten was to take her seat among them as vice president, the ladies of the committee were more than usually busy. Half of them were nonentities, the business of the club really lying in the hands of a few—but those few were notable bodies.

Lady Matthew Winterton, seated next to the president's chair, was a middle-aged woman of plump proportions. Her silvery gray hair was worn in crinkled bands either side her matronly face; her dress of black silk, made in the fashion of a dozen years before, fitted closely to her figure—her spotless white cuffs and collar might have been those of a hospital nurse. Lady Matthew was a faddist, as Lady Alexander Fox had said, in dress, as well as other things. Her husband—a man with his soul devoted to Art—could not stand her fads any longer, and had insisted on a separation; but Lady Matthew still went on making herself absurd, and believing herself to be treading in the footsteps of the martyrs all the while. She never found open fault with anything she saw in the club, but her silence was more eloquent than words.

Mrs. Pooteran Works—sometimes called Mrs. "Waterworks" by her dear friends, on account of her being a great Temperance advocate—was quite a different person. She was the most noisy woman on the committee, and was forever preaching against the iniquity of Lady Barton, as president, for allowing such things as wines and spirits on the premises.

Some people thought it strange that Mrs. Pooteran Works, being so strict a teetotaler, should lend her name to a club where brandies and sodas could be called for *ad lib.*, but she defended the suggestion by saying she remained a member from conviction, feeling that her example was better than her precept. When not in town, Mrs. Pooteran Works spent her time in disseminating her principles from the public platform, whence however it had never been recorded that she had made a single convert.

Why Lady Alexander Fox was one of the club committee would have been difficult to say, for she certainly was neither clever nor practical. Doubtless she had

been elected partly because of her battered title, and partly because they wanted, through the conciliation, to keep her among them. Anyway there she was, whispering scandal, intermingled with religion, of every other woman whose name was brought upon the *tapis*, and gazing through her double-barreled glasses, with an amused smile, at anybody else who happened to be speaking.

Miss Emma Noble, the author of "The Revolt of the Harem," had not inaptly been termed, "the boss of the show," for she was always very much *en évidence*, whenever any question of importance was being discussed. On the present occasion, she was sweeping up and down the room in a restless and imperious manner—her long train of brocade, of a dead plum color, making an irritating *frou-frou* as it waggled after her over the carpet. Miss Noble's figure was an excellent peg to hang the æsthetic drapery of the period on—like two planks lashed together—and she usually clothed it in a *négligé* and *degage* style. Her loose vest of apricot surah silk, which formed the front of the plum-colored brocade, hid a multitude of sins in the way of absence of *contour*, and her untidy headdress left several little stray wisps of hair to mercifully shelter the corrugations of her lean and discolored throat. Her features were bold and Romanesque, her hands long and bony, her age verging on the forties—but she had written "The Revolt of the Harem," and she thought all the world of herself.

Women had heard or read that the book was indelicate and touched on matters seldom, if ever, discussed in a novel before; in consequence they had rushed to get it from the libraries, and as women support the circulating libraries, the volumes had been much in demand and caused the book to run into a second edition, much to the astonishment of its publisher. It was a pity, for it had far better have been left to die a natural death. It was not a clever book: the construction was faulty, the characters were extremely unnatural, and it was written in a prosy style. But it was improper, and therein lay its charm. If women were educated to know all that concerns themselves; if they had the evils of life, and how to avoid them, put in a practical manner

before them as soon as their minds could appreciate the knowledge, they would not run after prurient literature as eagerly as they do. To educate them as efficiently as is done in the present age, and yet not to educate them altogether, is to create the appetite for eating, without supplying the food wherewith to gratify it. Women who had been educated, either through the chance of circumstances or the world, took no pleasure in reading "The Revolt of the Harem." To them it presented only a tame and inefficient condemnation of a common evil, which could be far better understood from the perusal of any medical work upon the subject. Had Miss Noble issued her protest in a pamphlet addressed to mothers, it might have opened some of their eyes, and roused them to action, but since she had published it in the form of a novel, it fell into the hands of the daughters instead, who, not being able—or at least, let us hope so—to understand the full meaning of what they read there, were either urged on to seek more definite information on the subject, or were left floundering in the Slough of Incomprehensibility.

However, the book had been driven, not through popularity and the praise of the critics, but because the libraries had not sufficient copies to supply the demands of the ladies who were "dying" to read it, into a second edition ; and Miss Noble thenceforth walked the earth as though it belonged to her, and she was the most famous writer thereon. What a comfortable thing it is to have a thoroughly good opinion of ourselves !

But with all her greatness, Miss Noble was not above wishing to secure Lady Phyllis Macnaughten for her friend. She was disgusted to hear that Lady Alexander Fox had got ahead of her. Much of her pacing up and down, on this particular morning, was due to that fact having been made known to her. The president cried "Order," once or twice, before the business of the day began ; and the secretary whispered to the lady who sat next her that someone must have trod on the lioness' tail, that morning. However, punctually at eleven o'clock, Lady Phyllis appeared in the committee room and the members settled down to work.

She looked very fair and sweet and young, among these famous women, most of whom had a history behind them. She was standing out for her rights and determined to have her own way, but it had not yet the power to make her feel either triumphant or happy. Macnaughten had kept to his word, and except for a brief moment when encountering each other in the corridors or on the staircase, she had not seen him since that evening. She had met little Roy that morning mounted on his father's shoulder, being carried in triumph to play in the library, and he had caught hold of her in passing and tried to drag her head and that of Ronald together.

"Mamma!—papa!—kiss!" the child said. But Macnaughten had jerked his head away, and Phyllis had proudly done the same, and they had met and parted with no better salutation than a curt "Good-morning." That was as she had been on her way to the carriage, and she had purposely given the order, "To the Pushahead Club," in a loud voice, as she was driven away.

But now she was there, and must put all such silly thoughts on one side. She was in her proper position at last—a position in which she could have a voice in ruling the world of her own sex.

She had imagined that the operations of the club committee would have been carried on in a more serious and businesslike manner, and thought it strange that there should be so much jumping about and whispering allowed; but then, she argued, she knew nothing about such matters, and since it was permitted, it was doubtless right and in order. But the only order in the assembly seemed to be the constant cries of "Order!" from Lady Barton, which nevertheless produced no visible effect. Presently someone nodded familiarly to Lady Phyllis from the other end of the long table.

"Surely!" she said to Lady Barton, "surely—that is not——"

"Our secretary, Miss Vipan," responded the president, smiling; "yes, indeed! it would be strange to find Miss Vipan absent from her post. A most indefatigable little person—here, there, and everywhere; we call her our private detective. Do you know her?"

"Slightly. But surely, her name was not down on the list which you forwarded me."

"Ah! perhaps not. I think the list was an old one. Miss Meakin was secretary then, but we found her rather unsatisfactory—not up to our work. With upward of five hundred members, dear Lady Phyllis, you may well imagine it takes all one person's time to keep the books and balance the accounts. And the secretary has the answering of all letters connected with the club business also, and the filing of receipts. Quite a little business in itself."

"I suppose so. And do you find Miss Vipan equal to it all?"

"Oh, my dear!" said Lady Barton in a low tone, "she is *invaluable!* Knows everybody in London, who they are, where they came from, and how much they have got. And *so* obliging—I have known her walk for miles to get a skein of silk or a quire of paper, just to oblige a friend. Very clever into the bargain—educated all Lord Castello's daughters—a fine Greek and Latin scholar, and as for arithmetic, I never knew one to equal her."

"She must be a *rara avis*," replied Phyllis, "but all the same, I don't like her."

Lady Barton lifted her eyebrows in surprise.

"But why not?"

"Oh! I don't know. It is difficult sometimes to analyze such things, but I distrusted her the first time I saw her, and I do so still. She is like a snake."

"And she speaks so *well* of you behind your back. She is such an admirer of yours, she cannot say enough in your praise. Poor Miss Vipan! I hope you will live to alter your opinion of her."

"It doesn't much signify either way, I think," replied Phyllis. "I shall not have anything to do with the accounts."

"Mrs. President!" exclaimed Miss Noble, who had been tossing over a number of papers until she had them in a hopelessly confused heap in front of her, "are we to commence with the motions this morning, or the applications for membership?"

"Well," said Lady Barton, looking at her watch. "We

are rather later than usual in commencing business to-day, so I think we had better go on with the applications. Lady Phyllis Macnaughten is so well aware of the hearty reception she will get among us that it is hardly necessary to detain her to hear the motion recording our vote of thanks for her accepting the position of our vice president."

"Hear! hear!" from some of the ladies at the lower end of the table, to which ebullition of welcome Miss Vipan added by clapping her hands. Lady Phyllis bowed, and the formalities continued.

"An application from Ella Buzzard Rake," said Miss Noble, reading from the paper in her hand; "author of 'Her Enemy,' etc. What do you say, ladies?"

"Who is she?" asked one of the committee.

"Oh, nobody in particular," replied Miss Noble contemptuously; "she has published one or two short tales, I believe. Her application cannot rest upon her authorship."

"But surely, 'Her Enemy' is by the author of 'Ideas,' which was quite *the* book of last season," remonstrated Lady Phyllis, astonished. "I think we should be proud that such a clever girl wishes to join the club."

"I fancy you are mistaken, Lady Phyllis," observed the president. "Was not 'Ideas' by a Miss Tate—not Rake? It was a very insignificant book, if I remember rightly—not much more than a pamphlet."

"But with more talent within its pages than in half the three-volume novels published," said Phyllis. "Mr. Dalgairns, the critic, recommended it to me, and said at the time that most people thought it had been written by a man."

"Oh, if we are to go by what Dalgairns says, we may as well shut up the club at once," retorted Miss Noble, more tartly than was prudent. "He is against us all round—the rudest and most ill-natured man I ever met."

Phyllis, recalling Dalgairns' strictures on the establishment in question, held her tongue and volunteered no reply.

"Besides," uttered Lady Matthew Winterton, in deep

tones, "we must not forget that this is a woman's club, and we do not depend in any wise on the opinions of men. Indeed, their being men's opinions, is the best reason for their rejection."

At this the new vice president felt very small and ventured no further suggestions, so Miss Rake's application for membership was laid on one side. The next one happened to be from the wife of a City tradesman, and was received with acclamations.

"We *must* have dear Mrs. Jukins!" exclaimed one lady. "She gives the most delightful balls, and I know from personal experience that her friends get all sorts of privileges, if dealing with the firm. Have you ever tasted any of their confectionery, Lady Barton, or their chocolate creams? They are beyond anything."

"I think there would be great advantages to be derived from Mrs. Jukins becoming one of us," observed the president, thinking of the restaurant supplies. "Still, ladies, you must of course do as you think fit."

"Is it not rather a pity," suggested Lady Phyllis hesitatingly, "since the club is already nearly as full as it can hold, to admit any more members of a class inferior to our own. I suppose it was instituted exclusively for gentlewomen, and it will get so mixed if we are not more particular whom we admit to fellowship."

"But Mrs. Jukins *is* a lady,'" interposed Miss Noble quickly; "at least she is a perfect lady on the mother's side."

Lady Phyllis could hardly refrain from laughing openly at the reservation, but replied instead:

"I beg your pardon. I thought someone said she was a confectioner's wife."

"Hus-s-s-h!" came in prolonged syllables from a voice at the further end of the room, as Mrs. Pooteran Works suddenly left her seat and professed to be searching the bookshelves for a volume of reference.

"Mrs. Jukins is Mrs. Work's aunt," whispered the president to her vice.

Lady Phyllis bit her lip and said nothing.

"Well," ejaculated Mrs. Pooteran Works tartly, as she returned to her seat; "it is quite time we were balloting.

Are these the only applications for membership this month?"

"They are all," responded the secretary.

"Then we had better proceed to business and see which is considered to be the greater lady of the two."

The ballot boxes were carried round the table, and each lady of the committee recorded her vote. When they were opened, Miss Rake was found to have seven black balls—Mrs. Jukins, the confectioner's wife, not one.

"*That* decides the matter," said Mrs. Works triumphantly.

Lady Phyllis could not resist asking:

"Which matter? That Mrs. Jukins is a greater lady or a greater author than Miss Rake, or that her membership will prove a greater advantage to the club?"

"We are not used to have any arguments once the balloting is decided," said Miss Noble; "whether elected, or non-elected, the matter is done with. Lady Phyllis must know what is the rule with all clubs."

"I confess that I am not acquainted with the rules of ordinary clubs," replied Phyllis; "and am afraid I have much to learn. But I thought it a general rule not to blackball anyone for private or personal reasons."

"Hush, dear Lady Phyllis!" again whispered Lady Barten; "don't irritate Mrs. Pooteran Works. She can make herself so very unpleasant, when put out."

Thereupon, Phyllis said no more. *Noblesse oblige.* That fact alone held her silent, but like the parrot who could not talk, she "thought a deal."

The applications for membership being disposed of, the monthly accounts were gone into and the expenditure checked. This was quite uninteresting to the new vice president, as well as not concerning her, so she had leisure to talk apart with Lady Alexander Fox.

"What excuse will they make to Miss Rake for not admitting her to the club?" she asked her, *sotto voce.*

"None at all. There is none needed. Silence means in these cases that an application has been rejected."

"But surely that is not polite. Miss Rake may be expecting for months to hear of her election. Would it

not be better and kinder to let her know our decision at once?"

"It is the rule of the club" replied Lady Alexander carelessly.

"But *why* have they blackballed her?" persisted Phyllis; "what objection have they to her? A man is not blackballed from a club, unless he has done something disgraceful—something against the code of honor. No stain on his private character has the power to exclude him. He must have done something publicly disgraceful, like cheating at cards or blackmailing. It seems terrible to me to blackball a woman who has done no wrong."

"*I* am powerless in the matter, against nineteen colleagues," said Lady Alexander, shrugging her shoulders, "and, indeed, I never interfere in the elections. Everybody gets a white ball from me. But there is a good deal of animus in it, you must be aware of that. Miss Noble and Mrs. Pooteran Works have it all their own way in the matter. There might just as well be only two members of the committee, as twenty. It is a mere farce. If they wish an applicant rejected, they can always do it, on the same principle that the jury in Court are always influenced by the judge's summing-up. That little woman Miss Vipan does all their dirty work for them. She is the jackal to their lion. Miss Noble has some reason for not wishing Miss Rake to become one of us. There is no doubt of that. Perhaps she is jealous of her. Perhaps she has found out that she reviewed 'The Revolt of the Harem' badly—Miss Rake is a great journalist, you know—and so owes her a grudge. It is something of the sort, you may depend upon it."

"Then it is most bitterly unfair," replied Phyllis, with some heat.

"Don't say so, even if you think it," said her companion. "They seem to have finished auditing their accounts. Let us make a move for luncheon."

And so the committee rose and adjourned to the restaurant, where a private table was always laid for them with luncheon on meeting days.

Here Lady Phyllis Macnaughten looked around her in

amazement, not unmixed with interest. All sorts and conditions of women seemed to be gathered together in the restaurant. Several of them were cyclists, attired, as Miss Nelson had been, in tweed Norfolk suits, with knickerbockers, stockings and gaiters, and crush hats or caps. They seemed to be jolly, frank, rosy-faced girls, quite accustomed to their costume, and full of life and energy. They were occupying a table near enough to enable Phyllis to hear all they said, and, from what she could make out, they had been having a "spin" as far as to Richmond and back, and had met some of the would-be lady volunteers, whose intentions formed the topic of their conversation.

"If they get up a cavalry corps *I* shall join them for one," exclaimed the prettiest girl of the lot, "but I can't say I should care for marching on foot. Clara Bell says the proposed uniform was to have been gray, but the girls wouldn't hear of it—so trying for most complexions, you know—so it has been altered to a dark red, something between Japanese red and maroon, which sounds better."

"Will Mr. Mackintosh let you be a volunteer, Janie?" demanded one of her companions.

"Mr. Mackintosh be hanged!" she rejoined energetically, and then catching Phyllis' eyes fixed on her, she burst into a loud peal of laughter. "I hope I'm not shocking anybody out of her seven senses," she continued, "but I suppose I may give vent to my feelings in the Pushahead, if nowhere else in the world; and my candid opinion is that if Mr. Mackintosh, or any other Mr., does not like what I do, he may lump it. It is rather late in the day to ask us to give up our own wishes for a man's selfish ideas of decorum; eh, girls?"

"Rather," agreed another, who was drinking claret rather freely, on the plea that she felt regularly "knocked" by her long ride.

"When Mackintosh first saw me in my knickers I thought he would have had a fit," resumed the first speaker merrily. "He stared as if I had been a ghost. When his dense brain had taken in the situation he ordered me in a lordly voice, intended to strike terror into the delinquent, to go and take them off. I told him

to go and take *his* off, which left the situation to me. How I roared! It ended by his going home in the sulks and declaring that he would never come back again—but he *did*, my girls, he did—and so they all will, if you only treat them with becoming firmness.

"Let them alone and they'll come home,
And bring their tails behind them!"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" came in a ringing chorus from the rest of the cyclists in honor of their friend's wit and decision.

Phyllis listened and smiled, but she did not quite like it. *This* was not *her* idea of Woman's independence and self-government. She had been delicately reared and bred, and though she was fully convinced that she wanted to have her own way and be made equal to her husband in all things pertaining to her mind and judgment, she would never have chosen such a way as this.

These girls did not look like ladies—did not even look like women, she argued with herself, and though she would have them free, she did not vote for unbridled license. Still, perhaps, she had no right to judge any one of them. What was one man's meat was another man's poison; and freedom, to be of any use to the sex at large, must be unlimited. If some giddy pates made a bad use of it, so did many male creatures the same. Women could not learn to avoid evil until they were made acquainted with it. So the little philosopher mused, as she consumed her cold pigeon pie and glass of burgundy.

"What do you think of that exhibition?" murmured Lady Alexander in her ear. "Isn't it disgusting? Enough to make one quit the club at once, eh?"

"Oh, no!" replied Phyllis, "I was just thinking about it. If we women are to have our liberty, we must have it altogether. We cannot say, 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.' I don't suppose those girls are ladies, though they may consider themselves so. A gentlewoman could never dress or talk like that. It is the same result as if you turned a crowd of women promiscuously on Hampstead Heath. The ladies among them would

walk quietly about—the *bourgeois* and the *demi-monde* would render themselves conspicuous by loud talking and vulgar actions. I don't blame the girls, I blame the club for making itself so promiscuous."

"You are quite right. A large number have crept in somehow who have no right to be here. Look at those two women, dressed almost exactly like men! They do not understand the motive for which the club was founded, and mistake License for Liberty."

"But where is the line of exclusion to be drawn?" asked Lady Phyllis. "Considering how mixed we are, I don't see how we are to exclude anybody without insulting her."

As she said the words she remembered the antecedents of the woman sitting beside her, and colored crimson. But Lady Alexander did not seem to take the allusion to herself. Her little affair had happened so long before that she thought people had forgotten it; indeed, she had almost forgotten it herself.

"We *are* terribly mixed," she replied, with her soft smile, "but it is useless to remonstrate against it. Miss Noble and Mrs. Pooteran Works, and I may add, Lady Matthew, have it all their own way, as I said before."

"Then it was an empty farce asking me to be their vice president?" observed Lady Phyllis, with a vexed air.

"Oh, no, dear Lady Phyllis; pray don't even *think* of such a thing." said Lady Alexander caressingly. "We are all proud of the honor you have done us by accepting the post. You are a great feather in our cap, you know. And *du reste*, do you really think it would add to your enjoyment to be mixed up with these party squabbles and antagonisms? I think you will feel so much easier outside the pale. Grace our club with your charming presence, spread our good name as far as you can, and leave all the dirty work to those who revel in it."

"That was not my idea in joining you," observed Phyllis.

"Perhaps not. One lives and learns. But I assure you, you will be the happier for it. Why should you grub among their old account books or care whom they elect or reject? It can make no difference to you. *Your métier*

is to look as beautiful as you can and shed credit on the Pushahead. Between you and me," continued Lady Alexander, laughing, "I consider *that* to be my business also, although, of course, I know that I cannot compare with yourself. Ah, what a lovely thing it is to be young! I would give half my fortune to go back to your age."

"Would you?" said Phyllis, wondering the while whether, if Lady Alexander had her youth over again, she would make a better use of it than she had done.

At this juncture, to her annoyance, Miss Vipan came up to their table and slipped into a vacant seat beside her.

"I haven't had a moment to have a mouthful before," she said, as she gave a liberal order to the attendant waiter; "it is really disgraceful that one of the servants is not told off to put all the books and papers away in the committee room after a meeting, instead of leaving the work to me. It is not part of my secretarial duties at all. I hope, Lady Phyllis, now that you are one of our presidents, you will reform some of these abuses for us. A word from you on the subject would have forcible effect."

"I think you should rather apply to some lady who has been longer in office than myself," replied Phyllis coldly. "I have no desire and no right to interfere with arrangements made by Lady Barton regarding the order of the club rooms."

"But you *should* have a desire," replied Miss Vipan sharply. "It is the presidents who see after such things. That is what they are for—to arrange for the comfort and order of the club."

"Indeed!" was the answer, given with elevated brows.

"And how is the *beau cousin?*" demanded Miss Vipan next, with her mouth full of fried sole.

"I am not aware to whom you allude," replied Lady Phyllis.

"Why, I only saw *one* cousin of yours to my knowledge at your house; Lord Percy Sefton, I think you called him."

"Poor little Percy!" remarked Phyllis; "and is it he whom you would designate by such a term as *le beau cousin?* Why, we have always considered him the

plainest member of the family. He is not at all like the Lisnors. He is a thorough Sefton."

"Ah, handsome is as handsome does," quoted Miss Vipan, with a look at her neighbor which was intended to be facetious.

"Oh, yes! he's well enough as far as goodness goes," replied Lady Phyllis, with assumed nonchalance, though she was longing to have an opportunity to cross swords with this impertinent specimen of her sex. "But I imagined you were a French scholar. You used the words in their wrong sense."

"Perhaps I shall learn better in time," said Miss Vipan, who could scarcely say she was a perfect linguist after that. But she had not finished even then. Presently she recommenced:

"You know Mrs. Warrington, don't you?"

"I have not that pleasure."

"Lady Fearon was speaking of her with you the other day in my presence."

"Lady Fearon was saying that she would like to introdnce Mrs. Warrington to me, that was all."

"Ah!" There was a world of meaning in the way in which Miss Vipan pronounced that "Ah!" "Well, I shouldn't be too quick to accept the offer, that's all."

"But Lady Fearon speaks so very highly of her. She says she is one of the best women on God's earth!"

"Ah, well, *Lady Fearon* may think so; it is not everybody who would take *her* opinion as decisive, you know; she has not much chance of knowing what is said about people——"

"Miss Vipan," interrupted Phyllis haughtily, "you are speaking of a friend of mine."

"Oh, I know; very good of you, I'm sure, to take the poor thing up; but it does not follow you need know all her friends. And Mrs. Warrington is peculiar, to say the least of it."

"Peculiar in good works, I have heard it said," remarked Phyllis angrily.

"Just so, particularly to the young man who lives with her. There is a great mystery concerning that young man. Some people say he is her son or her nephew;

others that he is no relation to her at all; *she* calls him her secretary, as if a woman like Mrs. Warrington required a secretary. Ridiculous! Why, she has no business except looking after a lot of poor children and old people."

"And what do you wish to insinuate, Miss Vipan, that this young gentleman, of whom I have never heard before, is to her? Have you any sinister motive in telling me this story? Of what possible interest can it be to me?"

There is no better plan to bring a scandalmonger to book than by driving him into a corner to make his meaning plain. He will insinuate and hint, and suggest and surmise, but he seldom says a thing straight out. When Lady Phyllis, therefore, asked Miss Vipan plainly what her meaning was in so speaking of Mrs. Warrington's companion, she could only hum and hah, and declare she meant nothing at all and was only repeating what had been told to her.

"Then you need never trouble yourself again to tell such things to me," said Phyllis, as she rose from table, "for I make it a point never to encourage scandal in any shape. It is at the root of all the misery and mischief done in this world, and I don't know which I consider most despicable, the one who repeats it or the one who listens. Good-morning." And she swept away with the air of a duchess from the secretary's side. Miss Vipan looked after her with a wicked light in her keen gray eyes. She hated her for her birth, her beauty, and her riches; at the same time that she would gladly have shared them all.

"Wait," she thought to herself, as she gazed after Lady Phyllis, "wait, my lady, till it is your turn. Then I'll pay you out for this. I shall get my knife in you sooner or later, and when the right time comes I'll turn it."

She saw no more of Lady Phyllis Macnaughten that day, but she neither forgot nor forgave the snubbing she had received at her hands.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DÉNOUEMENT.

COLONEL BERNARD had been more staggered than annoyed to hear from Miss Vipan, in her smooth, subtle, fawning way,—for Miss Vipan always contrived to appear to flatter while she condemned,—that his wife was a member of the Pushahead Club. He was too suspicious of her to permit her to mix freely with male acquaintances, but in a club strictly devoted to women there could, he thought, be no danger of that sort. And so long as Cissy did not come upon him for money wherewith to pay for the pursuit of pleasure, he did not much care what she did, so long as no young men dangled after her. But when he heard her confess where she had obtained the entrance money, matters assumed a totally different aspect; Cissy amusing herself with her own sex, without costing him anything, was one thing—but Cissy paying for her whistle with coin deducted from the filling of his stomach, was another. Colonel Bernard, like many another man, cared for the pleasure of eating before any other luxury. If he had had a good dinner, he was in a good temper, and *vice versa*. He had fancied that his meals had not been so carefully ordered and prepared lately as they had been at first, and this was the reason. The housekeeping money was frittered away on his wife's idle fancies, and he might fare as best he could.

He did not like trouble, but he would have taken any trouble sooner than dine badly; so, as a punishment for Cissy's supposed offense, he proclaimed her unworthy to have the charge of so grave a duty, and that thenceforth he should take it on himself. The cook was ordered to present herself before her master, regularly, to receive the orders for the day, and having kept a strict account of her expenditure, to deliver it up every Saturday and

receive payment for the same. Mrs. Bernard was delighted to be let off so easily. She detested housekeeping, and her greatest trouble had been to think what they should have for dinner. It is true that the announcement was coupled with a strict command that she should never enter the doors of the Pushahead Club again—not because (as in the case of Macnaughten) the colonel feared his wife might not derive any benefit from the association—but simply as a means of paying her out for her rebellion in acting without his permission. He reiterated his orders also that, during his absence, she was to go nowhere, unless accompanied by the housemaid Jane.

"Never mind, ma'am," said Jane, who was as "up to snuff" as most servants nowadays, and had a shrewd notion why her young mistress did not want her forever tripping at her heels; "*I'll* find a way to make the colonel alter his mind about this here. And bless you! if I was *forced* to go, it wouldn't make no difference to your pleasure. *I* know when to hold my tongue and when to speak out, and if you met a friend and didn't want me no more, why I'd only be too glad to turn the other way and take a walk on my own account."

Jane was as good as her word, and *did* find a way to make her master regret the order he had issued. The next week his socks were unmended, the buttons were off his shirts, his clean clothes had not been aired.

"Lor, sir!" cried the artful Jane, when he angrily inquired why she had failed to execute her ordinary duties, "you can't expect me to be in two places at once. I aint got more than one pair of hands. How can I go walking with the mistress in the afternoons and mend your things at the same time? You don't leave me no time to do it, sir. And you'll please to remember as I'm not a black slave and moroccer, as doubtless you've been used to, and I've walked with Mrs. Bernard to oblige you—which it aint *my* business, as everyone knows—and so your socks and shirts must take care of themselves."

This argument being a conclusive one in the colonel's estimation, the embargo was taken off his wife walking alone, and his socks and shirts continued to be mended.

On the morning when he was to start to visit his old friends at Portsmouth, Bernard came down to breakfast in such a beaming temper that he was almost unrecognizable. He was dressed in a new suit, and his tie and button-hole were perfection. Cissy wondered why he should get himself up so carefully, in order to visit men friends. But she was too thankful that he was going to make any untoward remarks. She only said:

"You look very gay this morning, Henry. It will be lovely down by the sea. I wish I were going too!" Which was a dreadful "cram," as everyone will see, but if men deceive, they deserve be deceived in their turn.

The colonel looked uncomfortable for a moment at this speech, as though he really feared his wife might insist on accompanying him, but after a slight pause he replied:

"Well! that might be very nice, but it is quite impossible, as I am going to stay the night with some bachelors; besides the barracks are not a nice place for ladies. I should object, under any circumstances, to take you there."

"Oh, yes! I know I can't go. But you will enjoy yourself greatly, I have no doubt. What time shall you be home to-morrow? Are you *sure* you can't come back to-night?" said Cissy wistfully.

"Quite sure. What foolish questions you do put. How *could* I get back this evening, when I have promised to dine with my friends?"

"Have you packed your dress suit?" she asked quickly.

Colonel Bernard fussed a little before he replied:

"Certainly! If you had any sense you would know that gentlemen dress for dinner, whether there are ladies present or not."

"Oh, of course!" said his wife.

"Now, Cissy, I must be off, and I have a word to say to you before I go. You will *not* go to the Pushahead Club during my absence—do you perfectly understand?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Now, don't attempt to deceive me, for I'm bound to hear of it afterward, if you do."

"I know Miss Vipan is your spy," replied Cissy bitterly.

"No such thing!" fumed the colonel. "Miss Vipan is a very amiable lady, but she has her eyes set straight in her head, and does not tell untruths, like most women. Any way, whatever you choose to think of her, I shall make it a point to ask her if my orders have been obeyed next time we meet."

And with this parting shot, the colonel left the room. His wife looked after his burly form, clad in the tight-fitting suit which showed creases across his middle-aged back, with an expression of hatred. He thought he had fenced her nicely round with precautionary measures to prevent her disobeying him—but, in reality, he had struck the last blow to make her openly rebellious.

"So that little beast, Miss Vipan, is to be set over me as a censor of my morals," she thought; "she is to watch me as a cat watches a mouse, and then report proceedings to my dear lord and master. Well! she shall have something to report then. One may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and my life cannot be more wretched than it is. I'll go to the Pushahead this afternoon, before I meet Jack, as sure as my name's Cissy Bernard. I did not mean to go—it is out of my way—but I wouldn't miss it now for all the world. And if I meet the Vipan there, she shall have a bit of my mind."

By which it will be seen that continued tyranny was transforming Mrs. Bernard from a shrinking, trembling schoolgirl into something very like a bold and defiant woman. So will the timid partridge limp in the opposite direction to where its nestlings lie; so will the unhorned ewe shake its harmless head at an intruder, when its lamb is by its side—and so will women, from the very knowledge of their impotency to make laws for themselves, become lawless altogether.

Lady Phyllis Macnaughten was just leaving the club that morning when she ran up against Cissy on the steps—Cissy, looking almost beautifnl in a white dress and hat, and the bloom of wild roses on her face.

"Why, my dear," exclaimed Phyllis, pleased at the meeting, "where are you going? You are positively

radiant. Has the colonel been making love to you, to give you such a lovely bloom?"

"The colonel is more likely to give me a bloom with a stick," replied Mrs. Bernard. "No; he has gone down to Portsmouth for a couple of days, thank goodness! and I have a brief holiday."

"Then you will spend it with me," exclaimed Phyllis eagerly; "won't you, Cissy? Come back with me now—my carriage is in waiting—and pass the night. We'll go somewhere nice this evening, and have a jolly time. You *will* come, won't you?"

But strangely enough, Mrs. Bernard held back—she, who a few days before would have hailed such a proposition with childish delight, now seemed as if she did not care to accept her friend's invitation—she stammered and grew red, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground as she replied:

"It's awfully good of you, dear Phyllis, it is indeed, and of course I should have been only too glad to have gone with you—but I cannot, I dare not. I am doing a very rash thing in coming here, for the colonel's strict orders were that I was not to quit the house during his absence and—and *I dare not*—and that's the end of it."

"But, surely, Cissy, he could not have included coming to my house. He knows you would be safe with us. Come! be brave, and trust to me. I will take you home to-morrow and speak to Colonel Bernard myself, and then I defy him to be angry with either of us."

But Cissy shook her head a dozen times—growing redder and redder the while.

"No, Phyllis! don't say anything more about it, please. It is impossible. I cannot go with you. I must not stay at the club more than a minute or two, or it will reach his ears some way or other."

"Then I shall go in with you," replied Lady Phyllis, as she prepared to re-enter the Pushahead, "for I have not seen you for an age."

Mrs. Bernard would rather her friend had returned home, and left her to her own devices, but there was no help for it—she could not force her to act against her own wishes—so they entered the general room together.

Cissy, with her white dress and hat, looked so young and pretty that she excited general notice, but she seemed bent on one object only. She rejected seat after seat to which Lady Phyllis directed her attention, and pushed her way to the top of the room, where Miss Vipan was seated conning the papers through her spectacles, and surrounded by her club cronies. She glanced up as Cissy's figure approached her, and remarked sarcastically:

"Is this Mrs. Bernard? Dear me, quite bridal-looking, I'm sure. Are you dressed for a fête?"

"No!" answered Cissy, boldly and loudly, "I'm dressed to come and see you, Miss Vipan, and tell you that next time you meet Colonel Bernard, you can tell him that you saw me here to-day, and that I told you that you are a sneak and a spy, and you ought to be turned out of the club for making the mischief you do."

"Cissy, Cissy! what are you saying?" cried Lady Phyllis, astonished by the torrent of words pouring from the little woman's mouth. "You must be mistaken. I don't think Miss Vipan knows Colonel Bernard to speak to."

"Oh, yes! she does," returned Cissy, still all ablaze. "She met him at the Nettlefolds' and she told him that I was a member of the Pushahead, and he said this morning, before he left home, that if I came here without his permission, he should soon hear of it, as he should ask Miss Vipan. And I say she is a mischief-maker, and everybody ought to cut her."

This noisy discussion had naturally attracted a considerable audience, and Phyllis' anxiety was to get Cissy away before she committed herself further. For she knew well that her poor little friend was no match for the woman she had pitted herself against.

"I am quite at a loss to account for this outbreak," said Miss Vipan at length, as she glared through her spectacles at her infuriated antagonist. "I certainly met poor Colonel Bernard—who appears a most charming man to me—at the house of Mrs. Nettlefold, one of my oldest friends, but I said nothing to him about his wife that was not complimentary. Why should I?"

"You told him I was a member of this club," stormed Cissy.

"Naturally I mentioned where I had met you," replied the other. "Am I to understand, then, that it is a secret?"

"You know it was. I've told you all so, scores of times."

"It certainly had slipped my memory, if you have," said Miss Vipan, still chaining Cissy with her cold, hard, steel-gray eyes. "There was one thing which I did *not* tell him—the name of the gentleman who so constantly accompanies you here."

Cissy did not know what to answer to this attack. She threw one look of hatred at Miss Vipan, who was smiling coolly in her face the while, and then burst into tears.

"Oh! come, Cissy, this is too silly!" exclaimed Phyllis, as she tried to draw her friend to one side. "Surely it is not worth crying about. Treat it with the contempt it deserves. No mischief-maker ever got the best of it yet. Even those who listen to her scandal despise her for it the while. Leave Miss Vipan to herself and come with me. She is not worth crossing swords with."

"Oh! that is your ladyship's opinion, is it?" remarked Miss Vipan acrimoniously.

"That is my opinion, madam," replied Phyllis, with dignity, as she led Mrs. Bernard down the room again.

"And now, Cissy," she said, as they reached the outer air again; "let me take you either to your house or mine. How I wish I had known your errand here to-day. I would never have let you expose yourself as you have done. Don't you see that you have only placed another weapon in the hands of that spiteful old maid? You have been very foolish. I am so sorry."

But Cissy was ready now to laugh at the adventure.

"I'm not!" she said, "I came on purpose to give the little wretch a set-down, and I wouldn't have missed it for the world. You don't know what a lot of that sort of thing—scandal and repetition—goes on in the club. I call it a nest of hornets. Sometimes I wish I could pile up all the old women in a heap and set a light to them."

"Oh, Cissy! you silly child," cried Phyllis, laughing against her will, "but are you coming home with me?"

"No, thank you, dear. I should like it awfully, you know, but—but—well! the fact is I'm engaged. I know *you* won't 'blow over' me."

"Cissy, dear, be careful. You heard what that old woman said about not giving up his name, but you've made her ripe to do it, now—and, for your own sake, my dear——"

"Oh! I'll be careful enough, Phyllis, but somehow I fancy this will be the last time I shall ever have a little pleasure, so let me have my way for once. The brute will be back to-morrow. To-day is all I have to call my own."

"Does Miss Vipan know his name?" asked Phyllis anxiously.

"Of course she does! He's been in there to tea, several times. They all take their 'mashes' there. Old Vipan would too, if she had one. His name is Captain Austin of the Third Bays. He bowed to me once when we were driving together."

"I remember," returned her friend thoughtfully, "and also that something in your manner struck me as curious at the time. Cissy, my dear Cissy, I entreat you to give up his acquaintance after to-day. You are a married woman, remember, and you are doing a very *risqué* thing. Pray, pray take my advice, and let this be the very last time—won't you?"

"Yes, yes, it shall," replied Cissy, only anxious to get rid of Lady Phyllis, in time to keep her appointment with Jack Austin. "I cannot break my word to-day, but it shall be the very last time I meet him, I promise you."

And kissing Phyllis hastily, she jumped into a hansom and drove away. Captain Austin was waiting for her, as a gentleman should be. He had an open carriage with him, and after deciding that they would drive to Richmond and lunch at the Castle, the order to start was given, and in a short time they had left town behind them and were in the midst of green fields and flowery gardens. Jack Austin was soon made the recipient of all Cissy's

news, and to her dismay he seemed to consider the visit to the Pushahead as imprudent as Lady Phyllis had done, and Miss Vipan likely to prove dangerous.

"I cautioned you the other day, you may remember, of the necessity of not letting the colonel get hold of my name in connection with yourself, and now, I very much doubt if this spiteful little woman will not make it her business to tell him of it. You have made a dangerous enemy for yourself, I fear, Cissy."

"Well, I couldn't help it," said Cissy, tossing her head —silly people are invariably inclined to be rude, when detected in or told of their folly. "I couldn't have rested till I had given her a piece of my mind, so it was to be. Besides I could tell of her, as well as she of me. I am sure it is a great deal worse to be a scandalmonger than to take you to the club to tea."

"That may be," said her companion; "but can't you see the difference in your positions? You cannot injure Miss Vipan—what is there to injure? I suppose everybody knows she is a scandalmonger and gossip—and no one can do anything to her for it. But she could dethrone you altogether, if she chose, provided the colonel believed her story. There is no question but that she could do you infinite harm and part us altogether. I am afraid we have been very imprudent, my Cissy," he concluded, with a sigh.

But Cissy wouldn't have that sigh at any price.

"How disagreeable you are, Jack!" she said, pouting her lips. "I won't go to Richmond with you. Tell the man to stop and let me out. I shall walk back and have some of the servants' dinner. I believe they have only cold meat, but that doesn't signify. Nothing signifies when you are so nasty and cross to me."

Of course he asked her pardon after that, and swore she should not leave him at any risk.

"No, no, let us have our one day of happiness, Cissy, whatever may betide to-morrow. Don't let us think any more of disagreeable things, but only of ourselves. Have you ever been to Richmond before? We shall drive through the Park, and when we have had our luncheon, we will get a boat and I will pull you up the

river, and show you the beautiful nooks and haunts there are there. That will not tire you too much to go to the theater this evening, will it?" asked Austin, as he concluded.

"Tire me? No. Nothing would tire me, with you. I love boating; and as for the theater, I could go to twenty in one evening. You think, perhaps, because I'm so little, that I am not strong, but you are quite mistaken. I'm as strong as a horse," said Cissy, stretching out her slender white arm, which the diaphanous sleeve left fully visible. Jack bent down his head and kissed it. She looked such a child, and talked so like a foolish child, that he almost forgot sometimes what a dangerous game he was playing with her.

Everything went off successfully—the luncheon was delicious—the boat heavenly—the drive back to town through the Park charming.

When Cissy had had her dinner at the Criterion restaurant, she was as bright and fresh as if she had just stepped from her dressing room, to enjoy the evening at a theater. Captain Austin had left the choice to her, and she had decided that they should go to the Savoy. Her intimacy with her companion had greatly increased since they had started in the morning. When a man has had two good meals, and imbibed a certain amount of liquor, he is inclined to magnify the charms of any woman with whom he may happen to be in company. And Cissy's charms did not need a magnifying glass in order to be recognized. They were quite visible to the naked eye, and especially on that evening. Excitement and pleasure and the open-air exercise had combined to tint her face with a very becoming color, and to make her large dark eyes dangerously luminous, and the fact that Captain Austin was holding her hand in his the whole time they were at the theater did not tend to lessen her bloom.

The opera was over at last—eleven o'clock had struck—and Mrs. Bernard thought she must really be going home. What would Jane think if she delayed her return much longer!

"Oh, bother Jane!" exclaimed Jack Austin, whose speech was just a trifle thicker than it had been when

they started. "You're not going back without your supper. I won't hear of it; besides I want some supper myself, and I couldn't eat it without you. Come along, we'll drive to Simpson's and have a snack—oysters, or something like that, and a glass of chablis. Now I insist upon it, so it's no use saying no."

He carried the girl off to the supper rooms, notwithstanding all her protestations that she could not eat another mouthful, and that Jane had sat up for her long enough. Austin was not unlike the rest of his sex, when shown a little too much favor—he had become arbitrary and dominant, and persisted in having his own way. And Cissy, having yielded so much, hardly knew how to battle with the wishes of her entertainer, so mounted the cab meekly and accompanied him to Simpson's.

The supper room was crowded, and it was difficult to find a seat. At last the waiter found a vacant table at the upper end of the room, and they seated themselves at it, with their faces toward the door. Austin was engaged directing the man to bring them a couple of dozen oysters and a bottle of chablis to commence with, and Cissy was looking about her rather shyly, lest there should be anybody present whom she had met before, when she saw something which nearly made her eyes start from her head. Advancing up the center of the apartment, looking to the right and left, in search of a vacant seat, marched a magnificent female, all bust and shoulders, which were however enveloped in a crimson plush mantle. She had evidently issued from one of the theaters—her face was much painted and powdered—her hair was dyed a bright golden color—her look was bold and defiant. But it was not the appearance of this woman, whose proper position in society it was not difficult to define, that fascinated poor Cissy as a snake fascinates a trembling bird—it was the sight of her companion, for the *preux-chevalier* in attendance on this lineal descendant of Rahab was no other than Colonel Bernard, whom she had imagined to be safely with his bachelor friends at Portsmouth. Cissy did not dare cry out or speak—she did not dare attract Austin's attention to the sight, lest a movement on her part

should betray her presence there—so she sat paralyzed with apprehension, with a fixed stare as though she were suddenly turned to stone—wondering if they would pass the table without looking her way.

But, unfortunately, their table proved to be the only one in the room with vacant seats, and the waiter directed his customers' attention to the fact.

"Here are two chairs, colonel," said the woman in a guttural tone, as she turned toward them, and in another moment she had deposited her ample proportions upon one chair, while the colonel took the other exactly opposite his wife. Cissy grabbed hold of Austin's hand so hard as almost to make him call out, but she had no voice to speak with.

"What's the matter, Cissy?" he demanded, and at the same moment, raising his eyes to their opposite neighbors, he encountered the glance of Colonel Bernard. The colonel was purple in the face—his features seemed to have swollen to twice their usual size—he appeared as though on the brink of a fit of apoplexy. As Jack recognized the position, his grasp tightened on the hand of the trembling creature beside him. There was no need for explanation. Both men perceived the situation at once. The colonel and his wife had equally deceived each other, and Jack's look of defiance spoke as plainly as words could have done: "She is under my protection now. Touch her, if you dare."

The colonel blew like a porpoise for a moment in order to gain power of speech, and then, rising from his chair, he seized the hand of his companion, and exclaimed:

"Come away at once! This is no place for us."

"Lor, colonel, what do you mean? The soup is just coming."

"Never mind the soup. We'll go to Gatti's. I will not stay here another minute," and dragging his friend after him, he stalked quickly down the room again, followed by the waiter, expostulating all the way, with two plates of soup in his hand.

Captain Austin felt he could not let the irate husband go like that. It would be everlasting ruin to Cissy if he did not explain matters on the moment. So, leaving his own

seat, he rushed after the colonel and the magnificent lady (who was still deploring the loss of her soup), and caught them at the glass doors which led out upon the corridor.

"Colonel Bernard!" he exclaimed hurriedly, "stop a minute. You must hear what I have to say, I insist upon it!"

"*You* insist, sir!" cried the colonel in a fury. "How dare you use such language to me? Take care I don't kick you down the stairs."

"Take care you don't attempt it!" retorted the younger man. "You owe it not only to your wife, but to me, to listen to my explanation of this unlucky meeting."

"*Wife*, sir!" roared the colonel in reply. "I *have* no wife. I disown the woman I saw seated by your side. She need never call herself wife of mine again."

"But if you will only be reasonable, I can explain the matter to your satisfaction," urged Austin. "As Mrs. Bernard was alone this evening, I persuaded her to go to the theater with me, and it was entirely my fault that she accompanied me into the restaurant. She wanted to go home at once—I assure you she did—but I was so hungry that I begged her to let me have a little supper first."

"I want none of your explanations," replied Bernard, "and I don't believe them. My wife has deceived me and disgraced herself, and I repudiate her; once for all, I repudiate her."

"I will take her home at once," said Jack Austin, "she shall be there in half an hour. I am sincerely sorry that I induced her to do anything of which you disapprove, but this shall be my last offense, Colonel Bernard, I promise you that; only don't blame anyone but me."

He tried to make the *amende honorable*, not because he did not despise the licentious old bully he spoke to, but for the sake of the girl, before whom he saw nothing but forgiveness or ruin.

But it was all in vain. Colonel Bernard, heated by wine and anger, would accept of no compromise.

"You will *not* take her home to my house, sir!" he exclaimed; "if you do, I will turn her out again. You have stolen her, and you may keep her! She never

crosses my threshold again. I shall give my servants orders that she is not to be admitted."

"My God!" cried Jack, all the folly and wickedness of which he had been guilty flashing across his mind like lightning, "you cannot really mean what you say? *You*—so much older than she is, and parading the town with a friend of your own. Man! think of your own shortcomings, and have some mercy on your girl wife."

"Lor, colonel!" interposed the magnificent lady, "don't go to make a hass of yourself. The gurl's only havin' a little lark, like the rest of us. Live and let live, say I. That's the best way to git on, aint it, sir?" addressing Captain Austin.

But Jack was too upset to listen to her worldly-wise advice. He could only think of Cissy. Yet the scene must be ended quickly, for they were beginning to collect an audience.

"Colonel Bernard, I appeal to you again," he said. "You can take Mrs. Bernard home yourself, if you like, and I will take charge of this lady in your stead, or I will take your wife back to Moseley Gardens for you. Only say what you wish and I will obey your orders to the letter—anything rather than make this unfortunate business, which is due to my fault alone, more public than it is."

"I have already told you," thundered the colonel, "that I refuse to take that woman back again! You have annexed her, and you may keep her. I decline to have anything more to do with her, now, or at any time. Come, my dear," and giving his arm to the magnificent lady, he conducted her downstairs.

Austin stood where he had left him, uncertain what to do. It was impossible, he thought, that he really intended to stick to his word and refuse to receive his young wife back again, just because she had committed the imprudence of spending the day with himself. But he feared there was a tough time before his poor little friend. When the colonel and his fair companion had disappeared, Jack bethought him of Cissy and the state of suspense in which he had left her, and turned to re-enter the restaurant. At the door he encountered the waiter, who had been watching the proceedings.

"Unpleasant old file, that, sir," he remarked, indicating the departing colonel with his thumb. "Smashed up your little party; eh, sir?"

"Yes!" said Austin thoughtfully. "Look here, waiter, let me know what I owe for the oysters and chablis, for I want to get that lady away from here as quietly as possible. Don't talk about the affair more than you can help, there's a good fellow," and tipping the man liberally, he returned to the table where he had left Cissy.

The poor child was sitting in the same place, white as a sheet. Jack sat down opposite to her as if nothing had happened.

"It's all right, dear," he said more cheerfully than he felt. The girl stared in his face as though he had been a judge about to pronounce her doom, and he saw that she was shaking visibly, but she asked no question of him—only stared in that fixed manner, with dilated eyes and nostrils. Austin saw that the best thing he could do was to get her away from public observation as soon as possible.

"Don't look at me like that! There's nothing to frighten yourself about; but I think we had better leave this place, lest there should be anyone here to recognize us. I've arranged with the waiter, so come along." He laid his hand upon her arm as he spoke, and she shivered as if she had been struck.

"Is *he* outside?" she asked in a low voice.

"Not a bit of it. He has gone somewhere with his lady friend. Ah, Cissy! I'm afraid he's a sad old boy. He hasn't much scope for blaming your little indiscretion. But come along, dear, it's getting late."

He drew her arm under his, and took her out of the supper room and put her into a cab. For some minutes Cissy did not speak, then she suddenly asked in a voice of terror:

"Where are we going? Where are you taking me?"

"Taking you?" replied Austin. "Why, home, to be sure! Where else should I take you?"

She received the announcement with a scream of terror that made him fear the passers by might imagine some violence was being enacted.

"Cissy, Cissy!" he remonstrated, "don't make that noise. Someone will be stopping the cab, if you scream so loudly."

But she took no notice of his words.

"I will *not* go home!" she replied. "I *cannot* go back to him! I will never go back! He will kill me. I know he will!"

"Nonsense, Cissy, what are you saying? The colonel will not touch you—he *dare* not! I will go into the house if you wish it, and tell the servants how it all happened, or I will be in the house to-morrow if you prefer it, when your husband comes home, to protect you from his violence."

"It is of no use," persisted Cissy. "He would only wait till you had gone. No, no! I know him too well, and nothing will induce me to go back to him."

"But what will you do then?" demanded Austin, with some consternation. "Shall I take you to Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, or to your mother? Where do your people live, Cissy?"

"In Hampshire. I cannot go there," replied the girl, in more subdued tones. "Nor can I go to Phyllis. She would not understand. No one will understand. I have been warned against this more than once. I did it with my eyes open. I must take the consequences."

"What consequences?" demanded Austin anxiously.

"Anything! anything which comes first," replied Cissy, in a despairing voice. "The streets—or the river, I don't care which; but I will never, never, *never* go back to that bad, cruel, wicked man again."

"Calm yourself, dear child," said Austin sadly; "and let me think."

He put his arm around her, that she might have some sense of protection in his presence, and tried to steady his mind and decide what was best to do for them both. He saw the dilemma in which he was placed plainly enough, in which he had placed the helpless creature beside him. He knew her terror of consequences was unfeigned; that to drive her back to the unhappy home she had jeopardied by her imprudence might be to drive her on to something much worse than lay before her

now, if he decided to make her future his care. Barrington's jests and Quinton's warnings, his mother's grief, his own ruined prospects, all the fell consequences of the act he contemplated rushed upon his mind, and made him shiver with apprehension; but Jack Austin was a *man* (which all men are not), and he could not desert the helpless girl whom he had led into this deplorable condition.

It was impossible. Honor, chivalry, humanity, cried out with one voice, "No!" Whatever the consequences of their rashness might be, they must bear them together —there was no doubt of that. And such things blow over—he might even, by keeping her in London, be enabled to maintain his place in his corps—the time might come when he could marry her, and acknowledge the tie between them publicly—anyway, whatever happened, there seemed to be but one thing to do now.

He bent over the little figure who was quietly sobbing on his shoulder, and said:

"Cissy, if you are really resolved not to go home again, there is but one other thing to be done. Can you guess what that is?"

She did not answer.

"You must come with me, and let me protect you for the future. No one shall ever strike you, or frighten you again, dear, while you are under my care. Will you trust your future life to me? Will you let me try to make you happier than you have been—to keep you and look after you, until the time comes when I can make you my wife?"

He had to stoop very low in order to catch the sobbing words that formed her answer, but presently he put his head out of the cab window and directed the driver to turn his horse's head and go to the Charing Cross Hotel.

CHAPTER XV.

PHYLLIS IS INCREDULOUS.

SCANDAL, like dirt, generally sticks. However contemptible the monger—however much we may despise the meanness of the system—it is difficult to forget the rumors we have heard, and hard not to wonder a little if they can possibly be true.

Nothing could have seemed more despicable in Lady Phyllis Macnaughten's eyes than the insinuation that Miss Vipan had so unnecessarily made about Mrs. Warrington. Had she been in an uncivilized state, she would have slapped the face of the false, mean creature, who took such an evil delight in rousing her suspicions. She told herself twenty times that day that it was beneath her to take the least notice of it, and yet she found herself the very next afternoon on her way to pay a call on Lady Fearon, in the hope of hearing that her estimate of Miss Vipan was correct. She found her friend at home, and the subject of Mrs. Warrington was soon on the *tapis*.

"I suppose you have not had an opportunity of bringing Mrs. Warrington to see me yet, Lady Fearon," commenced Phyllis.

"She has been so very busy, Lady Phyllis, that she has been quite unable to leave her hospital. She has had five cases of burns and scaldings lately, and the sufferings of the poor little creatures have been terrible. In such cases, she will never leave her post, but attends to them entirely herself. Oh, she *is* a good woman, Lady Phyllis. When I think of her large-hearted charity and devotion, I feel as if we women of society (you'll forgive my saying 'we,' won't you ?) are not fit to cumber the earth."

"What made Mrs. Warrington first think of setting up a hospital ?" asked Phyllis.

"It was after Mr. Warrington's death. They were a most attached couple, but she had no children and her time hung on her hands. Besides, she has a good income, and she decided to expend it on charity. That was quite twenty years ago. So she founded this hospital for the children of the poor; chiefly for accidental cases, or simple ailments that are likely to devolve into something serious if not properly attended to. I have seen as many as twenty children under her care at the same time, but as a rule, perhaps not more than ten or twelve. She has nurses to assist her, of course; but all the management falls into her hands, and she is goodness itself to them. And she does a great deal more than that. She helps the parents with clothing, and dinners, and coal; in fact, she does whatever her hand finds to do."

"And she has no children of her own," said Lady Phyllis musingly. "I fancy someone told me that she had a son living in the house with her."

"Oh, no! a nephew," responded Lady Fearon quickly. "That is another piece of goodness on her part. Her brother, who is a solicitor, was left a widower very early, with a baby boy. In a year's time he married again, and Mrs. Warrington saw intuitively that the second wife was not likely to make a good mother to the child, who was delicate and backward. So she adopted him, and has brought him up as her own son. She has given him a first-rate education, and he has been admitted to the Bar. A fine, good-looking young fellow, too. Indeed Sir Richard thinks very highly of his talents, as well as of himself. His aunt is very proud of him, and he is devoted to her. He might return to his father's roof now, if he liked, for there are no children by the second wife, but nothing on earth would make him leave his aunt. I like young Arbuthnot. He is a thorough gentleman."

"I beg your pardon. What did you call him?" inquired Lady Phyllis, pricking up her ears.

"Frederick Arbuthnott," repeated Lady Fearon. "May I bring him also to see you some day, Lady Phyllis. I am sure you would like him."

"I think—I almost fancy—he must be the son of my

father, Lord Lisnor's, solicitor—Mr. Arbuthnott of the firm of Arbuthnott, Grant & Grant, of Chancery Lane."

"How very strange! Of course he is, and now I come to think of it, Mrs. Warrington told me some time ago that he went down to Lord Lisnor's estate, in place of his father, who was ill. Is that correct?"

"Quite!" replied Phyllis. "One of my sisters mentioned his name to me when I was down there, a few weeks ago. I should like to know Mr. Arbuthnott very much, Lady Fearon. Pray don't forget to bring him to me as soon as you can. And if he should display any reluctance in the matter, tell him that my sister, Lady Helen Powell spoke of him to me, and I *want* to make his acquaintance."

"Oh, dear! I am afraid you will turn the poor young man's head," cried Lady Fearon, laughing, "but I hope you will not be disappointed when you see him. He is not at all a society man, remember. He has worked too hard for that. He is only just a frank, intelligent, sensible fellow."

"I shall like him all the better for it," said Phyllis, as she took her leave of Lady Fearon, and drove to the Pushahead Club.

Her object in going there that afternoon was to meet Cissy and repeat the caution she had addressed to her the day before. Phyllis was beginning to feel uneasy about her little friend. She had always thought Mrs. Bernard silly and frivolous—but now she saw she could be obstinate and headstrong as well. And there can scarcely be a more fatal combination to steer us through the quicksands of evil. She intended, if Cissy were present, to get her to take tea with her quietly, and have a serious talk with her on her *escapade* of the day before. She had had no time then to point out the grave danger which she ran in thus openly opposing her husband's commands—for, as Cissy had truly said, she had no powerful relations to take her part in case of a rupture between them.

Phyllis glanced round the sitting room as she entered, but the familiar little figure was not in view. Groups of ladies were clustered together on the settees and divans,

but no Cissy was to be seen among them. As she passed up the room, Lady Phyllis inquired of one or two members if they had seen Mrs. Bernard there to-day, but they only shook their heads and looked conscious. At last her question reached the ears of the secretary, who was seated by the side of Mrs. Pooteran Works, drinking coffee.

"Are you asking for Mrs. Bernard, Lady Phyllis?" she said. "It is scarcely likely, I should think, that you would find her here to-day."

At which surmise several ladies, sitting near, laughed, as though Miss Vipan had said a good thing.

"And why is it not likely that I should find my friend here to-day?" replied Phyllis, in the cold tone in which she had taken to address Miss Vipan. "Has she made you her special messenger to inform me of the fact?"

"Oh, dear no!" said the secretary acidly. "Mrs. Bernard has never been in the habit of placing her confidences in me, I am happy to say, and I am quite sure that she will have no opportunity of doing so henceforward."

"You always talk in enigmas, Miss Vipan," returned Phyllis, "and I am quite in the dark as to what you are driving at now."

"You'll hear soon enough, Lady Phyllis," said the other. "I would rather not be the first to inform you, but anyone who saw how Mrs. Bernard went on yesterday might have guessed what the end would be."

"Are you alluding to the very just rebuke she gave you for talking scandal and repeating things which are no business of yours?" asked Phyllis gravely, "because if so, I must tell you that I consider Mrs. Bernard was quite right, though she might have conveyed her displeasure in a more dignified manner. I can understand her annoyance more readily to-day than I could yesterday. I have just come from Lady Fearon's, and she has been telling me all about the gentleman who lives with Mrs. Warrington, and concerning whom you were pleased to make various insinuations to me. I am sure you will be glad to hear that you are utterly mistaken—that he is Mrs. Warrington's nephew, whom she has most gener-

ously reared and educated from a child—and that he regards her as his mother and is ready to bring an action for libel against anyone who presumes to attack her fair fame."

Miss Vipan's white, corpselike face grew almost red at this speech from her opponent. She resembled a wolf at bay, as she showed her false teeth and said:

"I consider it a most unjustifiable thing for one lady to repeat the words of another, particularly when they were said in confidence. You can only have done so in order to make mischief."

"Pardon me. In the first place nothing that you say to me can ever be in confidence,—*that* is only between friends,—neither am I so ready as you imagine to take a leaf out of your book. I have never been a scandal-monger. Lady Fearon's testimony respecting Mrs. Warrington and Mr. Arbuthnott was given of her own free will. But I thought I would prove to you how untrustworthy your libelous story was."

"Perhaps my next story will also come under the head of libel, Lady Phyllis," exclaimed Miss Vipan, "when I tell you that your bosom friend, Mrs. Bernard, has disgraced herself by running away with Captain Austin of the Third Bays."

"Who *dares* to say so?" cried Phyllis, flaring up in defense of the absent Cissy.

"We have it on the best authority—that of her husband, Colonel Bernard; whose testimony, perhaps, you will believe sooner than you would mine."

"I do not believe it—it cannot be true!" exclaimed Phyllis, in the utmost distress. "Who is it who dares to spread those infamous falsehoods? Colonel Bernard would say anything—particularly if goaded on by a tongue like yours. He is always ready to believe the worst of that poor child. He has probably driven her from her home by his cruelty, and then he propagates the rumor that she has run away with someone else. Colonel Bernard is a bad man. I would not believe him on his oath."

"It is scarcely likely, though," put in Mrs. Pooteran Works, "that a husband would take away the reputation

of his own wife, Lady Phyllis. I know that in this instance Miss Vipan has good authority for saying that Mrs. Bernard has left her home, and with the gentleman named."

"It is untrue," repeated Phyllis steadfastly, "and I will not believe it on the evidence either of Miss Vipan or Colonel Bernard. I have known Cissy since we were children together, and she is not the sort of girl to take the bit into her teeth. She is far too timid. That horrible man has driven her into the river perhaps—but not to do anything wrong."

"I hardly think that Mrs. Bernard would be quite so simple as to jump into the river!" said Mrs. Pooteran Works, with a pitying smile for Phyllis' ignorance, "when she had the alternative of jumping into the arms of a good-looking young man. We saw enough of her way of going on with Captain Austin at the club—didn't we, Miss Vipan?"

"We did indeed," acquiesced the secretary.

"I disbelieve you both!" replied Phyllis hotly.

"Here is our president," observed Mrs. Pooteran Works. "Perhaps you will put more credence in her word than ours, Lady Phyllis."

Phyllis turned to Lady Barton.

"Lady Barton, as the president of this club, I appeal to you to put a stop to the scandal that is being circulated about my friend Mrs. Bernard, by Miss Vipan and Mrs. Pooteran Works. They are telling everybody that she has left her husband for Captain Austin. It is shameful—disgraceful—that a young woman's reputation should be so lightly sworn away. I know nothing of the matter myself, but I *do* know that Mrs. Bernard has been subjected to so much cruelty at the hands of her husband lately that it is sufficient to make any girl leave him; but not with another man. It is not true. I will not believe it."

"It is very sad, my dear Lady Phyllis; very sad indeed!" said the president, "but what *are* we to believe? Colonel Bernard came here this morning with a terrible tale about having met his wife out last night at some place or other, in company with the gentleman whom I

regret to say she has but too often introduced here, and that she actually refused to return home with him,—they both defied him,—and so of course, as he says, there is but one remedy for such an offense—the law."

Lady Phyllis was terribly upset. She was too proud to break down before Miss Vipan and Mrs. Pooteran Works ; but her suppressed emotion was so evident, her features worked so painfully, and her frame shook so visibly that Lady Barton took compassion on her and drew her apart to her private room, where she sunk upon the sofa and gave vent to her grief and disappointment in a burst of tears.

"My poor, poor Cissy !" she sobbed. "It is not true. It is some falsehood of that dreadful man. He wants to deprive her of all her friends in order that he may have the better opportunity to make her life miserable. *If* she has gone—but I do not believe it for a moment—but, should it be the case, he has driven her to it, from fear and misery."

"Here, my dear Lady Phyllis ! drink this," urged Lady Barton, holding a glass of wine to her lips. "It is very good of you to take your poor friend's downfall so much to heart, and there is no one but will respect you for it. You are a true friend to Mrs. Bernard, and she is fortunate to have secured such an advocate."

"Ah ! if this horrid tale is true, she will want all the friends she has, poor girl ! to rally round her and protect her. How cruel women are in such cases, Lady Barton ! How they hound an unfortunate creature, who has been driven to her action perhaps by the pure force of circumstances, until they make her life a curse to her. But, thank God ! we take a more reasonable view of such things now. In a few more years we shall no longer close our doors against a desperate woman, while we unlock them for the man who led her wrong. Times are changing, are they not ? with the Pushahead Club to lead the way ?"

She smiled faintly as she said the words, but Lady Barton did not quite seem to understand her.

"Not that I believe it," resumed Phyllis, after a while, "and I never *will* believe it, till I hear it from

Cissy's own lips—least of all on the authority of Miss Vipan, who seems to be never happy unless she is destroying the character of someone or other."

"I think you are just a *leetle* hard on poor Miss Vipan, dear Lady Phyllis," said the president gently. "She has her weaknesses, doubtless, as well as the rest of us, but in this instance I think she has reason for what she says. No one could have better authority in such a case than the testimony of the lady's husband."

"Well! he is the last person that I should believe," replied Phyllis doggedly, as she rose from her seat. "I will not return to the clubroom, Lady Barton—this business has upset me too much. I feel I shall not rest until I have seen my poor little friend and found out how much truth there is for the scandal concerning her."

"You will *see* her, Lady Phyllis," exclaimed the president, with open eyes. But Phyllis mistook the reason of her amazement.

"Certainly! that is, if I can find out where she is in hiding. I wonder why she did not come straight to me. She knows how welcome she would have been. And then all this horrid tittle tattle would have been avoided. Good-by, Lady Barton; I hope I shall be in again tomorrow with better news."

With which Phyllis ran away to her carriage and drove at full speed to Hill Street.

Lady Barton looked after her in astonishment.

"And she actually *believes* in her!" she thought incredulously; "one woman actually believes in the virtue of another. Well! I never met with such a thing in the whole course of my life before. It is marvelous—incredible! The world must be coming to an end. And in Mrs. Bernard of all people! Lady Phyllis Macnaughten must be either very innocent or very ignorant."

But Phyllis was neither. She had stood out manfully for her friend before that crowd of spiteful, envious women, but a great fear was knocking at her heart, the while, that Cissy had indeed cut the Gordian knot of her matrimonial difficulties by running from one danger into another. Poor little frightened hare! driven by curses, kicks, and blows from her form into the cold, snow-

covered country—who was to blame her if she crept into the first warm covert which seemed open to her! It was the old story over again. A woman between two men, like a shuttlecock between two battledores, tossed by cruelty on one side into what looked like kindness and love on the other. Who, with a tender, suffering nature, would go back willingly to the cruelty? It was not the fault of Women that these disasters happened so often—it was the fault of the laws which men made to protect their goods and chattels. And women were no longer goods and chattels. Education and the advance of the age had so enlightened them that they would no longer submit to be treated like cattle. The men would not improve the laws on their account. They had still but one way out of a miserable marriage—was it a wonder if they took that way? *She* would take it, Lady Phyllis said defiantly to herself, if Ronald treated her as Colonel Bernard had treated Cissy.

She was burning with anxiety and indignation as she ran into her own house. She did not quite know what steps she should take to find out the truth, but she felt that she must do something to set her mind at rest before the night set in. It was then about six o'clock, and as she entered the hall she encountered her husband, who had preceded her by a few seconds and was being relieved of his hat and stick by Travers.

He looked at his wife nonchalantly as she came up to him, and said;

"Well! this is a nice story about your friend Mrs. Bernard?"

"What have you heard?" she demanded breathlessly.

"If you will come into the library, I will tell you," he replied.

She followed him into the apartment, and he commenced without further ceremony.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEPARATION.

"SHE has bolted with Austin of the Third Bays."

Phyllis believed the story now; that her husband should also have heard it was like cold water dashed on her hopes—still, she held out manfully for Cissy's reputation.

"It *cannot* be true!" she exclaimed. "Who is your authority?"

"It's true enough," replied Macnaughten, with a hard laugh; "everyone knows it is true. The news is all over town. Austin's barrack chum, Tom Barrington, was my informant. He says he has foreseen it some time—that Austin and Mrs. Bernard have been meeting secretly all through the season, and both he and Quinton knew there could be but one ending to it. Austin is a fool—and she is a thousand time worse."

"Why? *why* should she be worse?" repeated Phyllis. She was standing on the hearthrug, with one hand on the mantel-shelf as she spoke, and she turned her lithe figure round and confronted him.

"Why should Cissy be worse than Captain Austin?" she asked for the second time.

Macnaughten was slow in answering.

"Why?—why?" he said at length. "Because she is the woman, and should have known better than to encourage him; because the woman is invariably the one in fault in these cases—a man is too excitable—he doesn't count—of course he will follow if she leads the way. But it is her business to repulse him, to keep him straight—to prevent him making a fool of himself, in fact."

Phyllis looked at him for a moment in silence.

"Oh, you men!" she said at length contemptuously; "Oh, you strong and noble creatures! made in the image of God himself. How contemptible you appear when you try to lay all the blame of your own misdoing on the shoulders of the weaker animals that you were intended to protect! Austin is a scoundrel, if you like, but she—poor little Cissy!—why should she be a thousand times worse? Do you know what her life at home was, with that brute Colonel Bernard—how he bullied and threatened and even struck her—how terrified she was of him?—how little recreation she ever had—how she was driven to deceive from the very force of his selfishness and want of control? And then this Captain Austin, whom you appear to consider so much the less in fault—what was *he* doing, to come, day after day, after this unhappy child—tempting her to do what he must have foreseen would end in her social ruin? Poor Cissy is very weak and silly, I know that—but she is very affectionate and timid into the bargain; a woman who has no power to stand alone, and so would all the more easily fall into the net this man spread for her. I do not know the facts of the case—I did not believe it was true until you repeated it to me, but I feel certain that, however it came to pass, Captain Austin was the most to blame."

"That is nonsense!" replied her husband; "you say it out of pure bravado. However foolish Mrs. Bernard may be, she was a married woman, and must have known her way about. A woman is never too silly to be cunning. And it was a most selfish act on her part. Look at the wreck she has made of poor Jack Austin's prospects. He will in all probability have to leave his regiment; he has very little private income; his career is at a standstill; he will lose his friends——"

"*Hang Jack Austin!*" exclaimed her ladyship emphatically.

Macnaughten looked at her in mute astonishment, mingled with disgust. He had never heard her make use of such a vulgarism before.

Lady Phyllis interpreted his feeling aright, and it made her still bolder.

"Are you aware of what you said?" he demanded, with an air of severity.

"Perfectly!" she replied, "and I will repeat it, if you like. *Hang Jack Austin* and all like him! Oh, yes, you can stare, Ronald, if you like; but if you don't take care, I will say something stronger. What are *his* career and *his* prospects and *his* friends, compared with the reputation and social status of my poor little Cissy? She has probably only left one brute for another. Colonel Bernard kicks her into the arms of Captain Austin, and Captain Austin, when it suits his convenience, will probably kick her into the arms of somebody else."

"Probably," returned Macnaughten, with a nonchalant air; "that is the usual ending of women who so forget themselves."

"Oh, shame upon you for speaking of it so lightly!" she cried; "shame upon all your sex for the careless manner in which you speak of the ruin of women. It is a jest to you when you see it in the person of another man's wife or another man's daughter; you will bring it about for your own selfish gratification, but you howl loud enough when it touches yourselves; when someone runs off with *your* wife, or seduces *your* daughter! *I* know what sort of home and man Cissy has left, and I know nothing of Captain Austin, but he cannot be worse to her than Colonel Bernard has been, and so I hope and trust she has made an exchange for the better, and I shall be the first to congratulate her if she has."

"You—you—will congratulate a fallen woman on her shame. Do you know what you are saying, Phyllis?"

"I do. It is about time we women stood up for one another, considering the way in which you men speak and think of us. If Cissy finds a kind friend in Austin, I shall be sincerely glad for her sake. I didn't think she had the pluck to take the law into her own hands, but I rejoice that she has, and I hope she will keep it."

"You disgust and horrify me by your sentiments," said Ronald Macnaughten. "One would think you were rowing in the same boat, to hear you speak. Mrs. Bernard will find her position no matter for congratulation, you may rest assured of that. When she is cut by all

respectable women, and all right-feeling men, she will wish she had thought twice before leading poor Austin into such a scrape."

"There are *some* women at all events who will not cut her for an offense which has been brought about by the brutality of one of the other sex," cried Phyllis hotly, "and they are the members of the Pushahead Club, which, thank goodness, includes myself! *I* shall never turn my back upon my poor little school friend, you may depend upon that, whatever you may think or say."

"Do you mean to tell me that you still intend to know this abandoned woman?" asked Macnaughten, flaring up in unison.

"Do you still intend to know Captain Austin, or Lord Charteris, or any other, I may say, of your demoralized men acquaintances?"

"You are begging the question, Phyllis. That has nothing to do with it."

"So *you* say, but you and I hold different opinions on the subject. Nothing shall ever make me give up Cissy Bernard."

"The next thing you will do, perhaps, will be to follow her example," said Macnaughten, carried by his annoyance to say rather more than he intended.

"Most certainly I should, if you presumed to treat me in the fashion in which she has been treated by her brutal husband. What would there be to keep me faithful to you? Do you imagine that I value money or houses or lands, above consideration and courtesy? You are very much mistaken if you do. I am not a weak woman by any manner of means; Cissy *was*, and yet even she dared to take the law into her own hands, when driven to desperation. You men have left us no other way out of it, you see. For us, it is either degradation or dishonor. I wonder which is worse—to be a man's butt for cursing or kicking, or be cut by people whom you don't care a jot for," said Lady Phyllis, with a *moue* of disdain.

"God keep you from either!" ejaculated her husband.

"I don't know why He should. I'm no better than Cissy, I am not sure that I am as good; and yet He has not kept her. I fancy it lies more in your hands than

the Almighty's. If you want to keep your wives straight, don't taunt them with their impotency for revenge; don't treat them like infants in the nursery, and above all, set them a good example yourselves. Till you learn how to do these things, there will be plenty of runaways among their number. For remember, it is not actually necessary to make an open bolt of it, like poor Cissy, to be a runaway. More of us do it secretly than in the open. We run away in thought and feeling, and respect and affection, until you have nothing but the empty nut-shell left, and all the kernel gone."

"Phyllis, what has come to you? You are not like yourself to-night!" exclaimed Macnaughten.

"I am not myself. I am only a woman thinking of the wrongs of another woman whom she loves. Cannot you see the difference? And then to hear a man like you speak as it were all her fault—*her* fault, poor little creature, who scarcely ever saw a man till her mother sold her to that old chimpanzee; who is as ignorant and frightened and weak a girl as God ever made; and not a word of condemnation hardly for Captain Austin is enough to make a saint swear. What is her past life compared to his? a sheet of blank paper. Captain Austin has probably led the life of most single men, has a record of immoralities and debaucheries and blasphemies to look back upon, and yet you dare to say she is the worst of the two. Why, he is not fit to undo the latchet of her shoe; no man is worthy of any woman, until he has *unmade* her for his own use. Sometimes I think that I despise you all too much for words!"

"Except, I conclude, your cousin Lord Percy!" remarked Macnaughten sarcastically.

Lady Phyllis reddened.

"It is like you to have made that insinuation," she said. "I see that I shall yet have to include you with the rest of your sex."

"It was ungenerous, I admit!" he answered frankly, "and it is untrue. But you make me so mad when you talk like that that I don't know what I am saying. One thing is very evident to me—that we are not happy together and that we should be better apart. Would

you like to be rid of me altogether? Would you like to have a separation?"

"As you please," she answered indifferently.

Macnaughten had thought that she would have indignantly refuted the proposition, and her apparent acquiescence cut him to the heart.

"Marriage has been a failure in our case—there is no doubt of that," he said, after a pause, "and yet I don't know why it should be. The question is, where will it end?"

"God knows!" replied Lady Phyllis, with assumed lightness; "perhaps, like Cissy Bernard's, in the divorce court."

"No, no! Phyllis, don't say that—don't think it, for both our sakes!" exclaimed Macnaughten excitedly. "We will cut it short before that day arrives. We will have a separation first."

"I think it will be best," she said.

"Is that your real opinion?" he asked, while a vague dream of peace and liberty passed through his own mind; "would your life be more endurable away from mine?"

"I think it would be best for both of us. You know we cannot agree, Ronald. Why not be free to live our own lives? My friends are not your friends, nor my tastes your tastes. We seem scarcely to have an idea left in common, and we never can talk for a few minutes without quarreling. If it goes on much longer like this, I think it will kill me."

"Then let us end it," he replied gloomily. "I am not happy any more than yourself. I can scarcely be more lonely than I am at present. I don't suppose that you ever loved me,—it was doubtless a mistake that we ever married,—so the sooner we rectify it, the better. It—it has taken me rather by surprise, Phyllis, though perhaps it ought not to have done so; so I will speak to you again about it in the morning. Are you engaged to go anywhere this evening?"

"I *was*, but I shall put it off. I do not feel as if I could encounter the remarks I may hear about poor Cissy. So I shall stay at home and go to bed early instead."

"Very good. I will see you in your boudoir at eleven to-morrow morning, if I may. Good-night."

He left the room hurriedly as if he could not trust himself to say another word, and after having dined at his club (where his frequent appearance lately had already become a subject of comment), he went on to see his friends, the Leytons. Not that he intended blurting out what had passed between Lady Phyllis and himself—only his perturbed spirit needed soothing, and he knew not where else to find peace and quiet.

The doctor was not yet in from his evening rounds, but Mrs. Leyton met him with a face full of pleased excitement.

"Eureka!" she cried. "I have succeeded at last, Mr. Macnaughten, in persuading my dear old man that he owes something to his wife and children as well as to his patients, and he has consented to take two months' holiday, and we are going—guess where!"

Ronald tried to show sympathy with the wife's pleasure, and forced a smile.

"How can I tell? The mountains of Switzerland, perhaps, or the shores of Cornwall. Somewhere very bracing, of course. Not to India, as is the fashionable craze nowadays, I hope."

"No! no! you are wrong all round, but I hardly expected you to guess it. What do you say to a cruise to Norway and Sweden, in the yacht of our friend Mr. Sunderland?"

"That will be delightful. Has Mr. Sunderland room for any more?"

"Would you like to come too? I believe it would do you more good than the moors, for you have been looking rather seedy of late. But is Lady Phyllis a good sailor? It would not be much fun if she were ailing."

"No, no! I was only jesting. How could one intrude one's self on a private party?"

"But it is not that exactly. We are to pay a sufficient sum for our keep on board. You see, Mr. Sunderland has this lovely yacht, the *Evaline*, and he loves to fill her, but he cannot afford to entertain a large party, so his friends pay a nominal sum each for their board. But we

shall get carried over for nothing, which means a good deal to us, and we shall be in delightful company. Now, do try and come too."

"We will talk about that afterward," said Macnaughten. "When do you start?"

"In a fortnight; and I have to make arrangements for packing all the dear children off into the country before we go, so you may suppose my hands are pretty full. But I would take any amount of trouble to get the doctor out of London. He can have no rest here, people *will* fall sick—so provoking of them—and they *will* have Jack into the bargain, and he is positively fagged to death. The next thing will be that *he* will fall sick, too; so I am just out of my wits with joy, to think he has yielded to my entreaties. Two whole months, spent chiefly on the sea. Oh! he will be a new man when he comes home again!"

"And how will you like a new man instead of your old man?" said Macnaughten, smiling, for it was a regular custom of his to "chaff" these married lovers on their spooniness.

"About as much as Lady Phyllis would like to exchange you for the first man she meets in the street," replied Mrs. Layton, smiling also.

"But that is no criterion," replied her guest sadly. "I am not Leyton. My wife might easily find someone better suited to her mind."

"I don't believe it!" cried Mrs. Leyton stoutly. "What makes you talk such nonsense this evening, Mr. Macnaughten?"

At this juncture the doctor entered the room, and all the details regarding the wonderful voyage to Norway were reiterated.

Macnaughten joined in the conversation as cheerfully as he could, but his old friends soon saw that something more than usual was the matter with him and felt proportionately anxious. After a while the doctor looked at his wife, and she, observing as naturally as possible that it was time she took a peep at her young ones, rose quietly and left the two friends to themselves. This married couple were so much one that they had no need

to ask each other's wishes. A glance was enough. They had not commenced, perhaps, by thinking so much together, but their mutual affection had made them *wish* to do so, and the result was that they did. With them, there was never any need of explanation, or apology, or excuse. What one desired, the other desired—that was the secret of Mrs. Leyton leaving her husband, on this occasion, to inquire into the state of Macnaughten's mind.

As soon as she had disappeared, the doctor rose and put his fingers on Ronald's wrist.

"You've feverish, my boy," he said; "what's the matter? Don't you feel well?"

"Not over and above," replied Macnaughten wearily, "but it's nothing. The outcome of the d—d unsatisfactory life I'm leading. Was there ever such a waste of existence! Twenty-eight long years of life, and nothing to show for them. Five thousand a year, and no one the better. What man could derive satisfaction from such an existence?"

"I have often told you you would be happier if you had some solid work to do—something more to show for your life than so many dozen volumes got through in the course of a twelvemonth. But your present condition is not due to that. There is something more recent the matter. Your pulse is that of a man on the brink of a fever. Do you sleep well? Have you been imprudent about bathing in the heat of the day? Is your appetite as good as usual?"

"Oh! stop your medical questions, for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed Macnaughten, as he drew himself impatiently away. "You must have deuced little discrimination, if you cannot see that whatever may be the matter with me, it has nothing to do with my physical health."

"Perhaps I am not such a fool as you credit me with being, my dear fellow; but your body is the only part of you upon which I can touch without seeming impertinence."

"No! that's not fair, Jack," replied the other. "How often used I not to go to you at Oxford, when I had got into one of my numerous scrapes; and how ready and

willing you always were to pull me out of them. I can never forget your goodness to me as a youngster."

"I should be just as ready to help you now, Ronald, if you needed my assistance. But I hope all that sort of thing is over for you. With such a beautiful wife——"

"Ah! dear old man! there's where your ignorance comes in. You fancy, because you have drawn a prize in the matrimonial market yourself, that all the world must do the same, whereas that is just where my trouble lies. Lady Phyllis and I don't get on together. You are the only person I would say it to, and I know you will let it go no farther—but I am not happy, Jack, neither is she. Our marriage has proved a woeful failure."

"You make too much of it, dear old chap. I have feared for some time past that you did not pull quite so well together as I could have wished, but surely it is going rather far to call your marriage a failure. Lady Phyllis may be a little disposed to be rebellious sometimes and want to have her own way; most young girls do that, you know. Marriage is a sort of fairy tale to them, in which all they will have to do is to sit still and be worshiped; but experience and babies soon alter all that sort of nonsense and bring them to their senses. Show her firmly that you intend to have *your* way, and it will be all right, by and by."

"Perhaps it will, Jack, but not as you imagine. We have decided to separate."

"*What!*" exclaimed his friend, in a voice of unfeigned astonishment. He had thought the young couple had a tiff sometimes, but his thoughts had never gone so far as this. "Nonsense, man, nonsense!" he continued, seeing that Ronald did not contradict his words, "it is impossible you can contemplate such an act of madness. Separate from Lady Phyllis—the girl I used to laugh at you for being so crazy about! And when you have a child, too. Oh, impossible! It must not be. You will regret it forever afterward."

"Do you really think so?" said the younger man. "But what is the use of two people living together, when they hardly agree on a single thing?"

"But that must be *your* fault, Ronald," said Dr. Ley-

ton seriously; "one must be the master in a house, and that one should be the husband. If your demands are just, it is your part to see that they are obeyed and no reasonable woman, no woman who loves you, would dispute them."

"But you don't understand," replied Macnaughten fretfully; "Mrs. Leyton and you keep house together on such a different plan. Lady Phyllis is, or wishes to be thought, one of the foremost women in society. In the present day that seems to me to include everything that in former times we considered unwomanly and unladylike. For instance, she insists upon belonging to a female club called the Pushahead, which entails her hobnobbing with all the members of it—some of them not over reputable—and introducing them to my house. But I have not appeared able to make her happy for a long time past, Jack, and I'm sure I don't know why. I've never refused her anything in reason, and God knows I've loved her—but it is not love that wives want nowadays. It's their liberty, free and uncontrolled—liberty to go where they like, with whom they like, and no questions asked. They say that men do it, and so should they. Perhaps they're right, but it is all very different from what I imagined a happy married life to be."

"They are not right—they are wrong!" replied the doctor, with energy. "And I am very sorry to hear that Lady Phyllis should take such a distorted view of things. But surely she *used* to be very fond of you, Ronald." Macnaughten's voice faltered, as he replied:

"I believed so. I thought there never were two people who cared so confoundedly for each other in this world before. I know I worshiped her. And she used to say she did the same by me. You know, Jack, that it is not easy to speak of such things, nor to describe them, but if you had told me this time last year that my wife would have deliberately and calmly agreed that we should separate and never live with each other again, I should have called you a liar."

"But it mustn't be—we must find a way out of it," exclaimed Leyton. "You are too young to have your life wrecked in this fashion, my dear fellow!"

"What would be the use of finding a way out of it, when I have lost her affection," asked Macnaughten moodily. "She told me only this evening that she would be happier living by herself; that she is determined not to give up any friend of hers of whom I may disapprove. And to tell the truth, Jack, *I* too am sick of it. To live within sight of one's lost happiness is worse than giving it up altogether. At all events in the latter case you miss the torture of longing to regain what is no longer yours. We have been virtually separated now for weeks past, and I would rather be out of sight of it and try to forget that it has ever been."

"But, my dear lad, you have your child to consider. Do you mean to relinquish all claim to little Roy?"

"Oh, no! of course not. That must be clearly understood, that I have as much access as I choose to my child. And when he is seven, I shall claim him altogether. I love the boy too much to give him up."

"But that will be very wretched for his mother. He will be the only thing which she can claim as her own."

"He will be the only thing that I can claim also," returned Macnaughten. "He is mine, and I will not relinquish him, except for his period of infancy."

"I hardly think Lady Phyllis will accede to your terms, Ronald."

"You don't know her, Jack—you don't know these women of the period. They would give up anything in order to gain their liberty. What do they want with children? The care of them interferes with their cycling and football and cricketing clubs. The woman of to-day is before all things a sportswoman, or a *littérateur*, or a politician. Everything else must succumb to her new craze, whatever it may happen to be."

"I think you are rather hard upon your wife," remarked his friend. "Don't forget that, before all other things, it is your bounden duty to be her friend and counselor. If you fail in your duty, you cannot expect her to fulfill hers."

"Well, well!" said Macnaughten, rather impatiently, "we have threshed the matter thoroughly out between us, and we have concluded it shall be. I am going to

consult my solicitors about the arrangement of matters the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Ronald," said Leyton, "listen to me. You always were a good boy at college, and took my advice, and it saved you from many an awkward scrape with the authorities. But you were never in so awkward a predicament as this promises to be, unless you will take a little more time for consideration before you put it into practice."

"I tell you it is of no use," interrupted Macnaughten, "the thing is settled already. I'm not going to bend the knee to an obstinate woman, determined to go her own way, and entreat her to listen to reason. She may go to the devil for me!"

"Nonsense! you don't mean what you say," exclaimed the doctor sternly. "I am not going to persuade you to give up your project, only not to put it out of your power to return to the old footing in the future. Don't go to the lawyers about it. Don't make your separation a peg for public gossip. Give Lady Phyllis and yourself a ghost of a chance to come together again."

"Never—never!" cried Ronald emphatically.

"And if it is to be, *never! never!* you will do yourselves no harm by a little delay in making your separation legal. Settle what you like with Lady Phyllis, privately—you can draw up and sign a paper of separation by mutual consent, agreeing as to alimony and such particulars, and it will be time to go to your solicitors when either of you break conditions. But for the child's sake, my dear old chum, and for your own sake and Lady Phyllis', don't set the whole town crowing over your matrimonial difficulties."

"I think you are right there, Jack," said the other slowly. "I confess I did not think of the boy before. For Roy's sake, it will be best to avoid all scandal. I think Lady Phyllis will see it in the same light. Thanks for your advice, old fellow. You always were my best friend. And don't think that I am not suffering over this wretched affair. I am suffering hell!"

"I know you are—that is why I hope that, with time, it may all blow over. Separation is a wonderful eye-doctor, sometimes, Ronald. It makes us see things in a

totally different light. And if you *do* go away from town for a while, I hope you will come with us on the *Evaline.*"

"Perhaps; that is for future consideration. Let me get out of this horrible nightmare first, and then you may be sure that I will run away as far from it as I possibly can."

He wearily bade his friend good-night, and returned to the house which was henceforth to be no home for him.

At eleven o'clock the following morning he presented himself in Phyllis' boudoir. No salutation passed between them except an ordinary good-morning, but neither looked as if he or she had slept, and though their faces were carved in marble their lips trembled and their hands shook.

"I have been thinking a great deal of our conversation last evening, Phyllis," he commenced, "and since we are agreed on the subject, there is no need to apply to a solicitor about it. A mutual consent to a separation, signed by our own hands, will be quite as efficient—so long as we remain of the same mind."

"*My* mind will not alter," she said proudly.

"You have quite made it up then. There is no chance of your repenting the step we contemplate taking, when too late?"

He could not have put a question more calculated to change her half-formed desire into an obstinate resolution.

"Whichever of us repents," she returned significantly, "it will not be *I*."

"And it will not be *I*," replied her husband. "I've had quite enough of this sort of thing, and am longing for a change. Of course, you know that nothing will make me give up Roy."

"You will not take him from me!" she exclaimed, with sudden terror.

"No; you need have no fear on that subject, because the law will not allow me to claim the guardianship of him until he is seven. But after that period I shall undertake his education, and you will have access to him, as I shall in the present. You will be able to see quite as much of him as if he continued under your charge."

"And what access shall you demand to him now? Are you to come to my home, wherever it may be?"

"Don't alarm yourself, Phyllis! I shall have no more desire to enter it than you will have to see me there. Reynolds can bring the child to see me once a week, but you must agree not to take him out of England without letting me know. I think you will acknowledge that those are not hard conditions. While matters continue as they are now, I shall allow you two thousand a year, which I hope you will consider sufficient for your requirements. I would divide my income with you, had I not the Roxburgh box and other farms to keep up."

"Oh, it will be ample—more than enough," she murmured.

"I do not think that. I wish you to live in the style that becomes my wife—for you must not forget that you are still my wife, Phyllis! But I am sure we are wise in acting as we are about to do. It has always been my opinion that when married people have ceased to find any pleasure in each other's society, they ought to part. It would be too terrible to keep together until we loathed each other, and our lives culminated in some awful scandal like that of Mrs. Bernard. For God's sake, save me from that, Phyllis! I trust you with my honor, which has never been sullied yet. Keep it sacred, if only for Roy's sake!"

"What I want, Ronald, is my liberty—not bondage to some other man. If bondage were not irksome to me, I should remain with you."

"And yet, surely, I have not been a hard taskmaster to you."

"No, but as I have already told you, I am sick of it all. Married life is one long weariness to me. There is nothing new or interesting in it. I am afraid—it seems a dreadful thing to say—but I am really afraid I am tired of you."

"Then it is indeed time that we parted," said the young husband bitterly. "Marriage is not made, it seems, for all time, but only while it can amuse or distract. And yet you used to say you *loved* me, Phyllis!"

"And so you used to say to me."

"True; I suppose we are equally to blame. But let us at least part friends. Let us part indeed, because we *are* friends and wish each other to be happy. It has always seemed terrible to me that people who have loved each other should become enemies and refuse to speak. We can occupy separate establishments and yet be amiable should we chance to meet."

"But if"—said Phyllis hesitatingly—"if you should think it best, Ronald—couldn't we go on living under the same roof, and yet—yet——"

"I understand you, Phyllis, but it is impossible. I am not sufficiently heroic to subject myself willingly to a lifelong agony. It is difficult to forget that we are husband and wife, although we have ceased to regard each other as such. I shall go into bachelor apartments. Do you wish to remain here? If so, remember the house is yours."

"Oh, no!" said Phyllis with a shudder, as she thought how empty the house where they had spent their first happy married days would seem without *him;* "it would be so lonely—I mean it is too large. I would rather go somewhere where I have never lived before. When this matter is quite settled, I will go down to my father for a little while, until I have decided what I shall do."

"Very good. Then I shall put this house into an agent's hands. You can choose what furniture you like, for your new home."

"I do not wish for any of it, thank you."

"In that case, I had better let it furnished. You appear to have your plans cut and dried. I suppose you have been thinking of the probability of this change for some time past," said Macnaughten bitterly.

"I have thought of it, naturally. Our marriage was a great mistake."

"A terrible mistake!" he echoed. "To marry a cold, loveless woman is the worst mistake that one can make."

"Or an indifferent husband. I fancy one is as bad as the other!" retorted Lady Phyllis.

"Well, you will have it all your own way now. You will no longer be able to complain of too much coercion. You can ask Charteris or Sefton or any other man to

accompany you to the theater, or out driving, without let or hindrance, and I hope you may enjoy it."

"I mean to enjoy it," replied his wife; "and you can dine and spend the evening with your dear friends, the Leytons, as often as you please, and no inconvenient questions asked when you come home again. You will know how to make use of your liberty just as well as I shall."

"I hope so indeed!" said her husband, as he rushed from the room. And in a few days more, the astounding news reached Sedgeley Manor that Lady Phyllis and Mr. Macnaughten had made up their minds to live apart for the future.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EARL REASONS IN VAIN.

THE announcement came upon Lord Lisnor's family like a thunder-clap. They had been such a highly respectable steady-going family, so free from all scandal and publicity, so foreign to the ways of fashionable life in London, that, in their simple eyes, a separation between husband and wife seemed almost as disgraceful as a divorce.

And what might it not portend? To what further disaster might it not lead? Was it possible that their sister—whom, notwithstanding their covert, jealous sneers, they had so much envied—was to be degraded from her high estate. Was she no longer to be rich, fashionable, and sought after? Might not all her good fortune end in her returning to her father's house, under impoverished and equivocal circumstances?

These were the surmises and sentiments of the elder sisters—Lady Catherine would not believe for an instant that dear Phyllis could possibly be in fault, and Lady Helen was full of fears for her sister's happiness, but none at all for her respectability.

The earl determined to go to town at once and see if he could not patch up matters between the young couple, and they could hear nothing definite till his return—Mr. Macnaughten's letter, announcing the fatal news, having said no more than follows:

"MY DEAR LORD LISNOR:

"It has become my painful duty to inform you that Phyllis and I have at last made up our minds that we shall be happier living apart than together. This conclusion, as you may suppose, has not been arrived at

hastily. On the contrary it is the outcome of many months of deliberation. Our tastes and ideas differ so strongly that married life has become one long pull for the mastery, under which circumstances I should consider it almost criminal to force her to bend her will to mine, or to endure the discomfort of my daily presence. We are still under the same roof, as we have no wish to part otherwise than amicably, and you may rely on me to make her future life as free from annoyance of all sorts as it is in my power to do. That she came to me without a marriage settlement will make no difference to her now, as I shall treat her exactly as if she had one. I have written you the earliest news of this unfortunate termination of our marriage, and I trust you will not blame me more than is necessary in the matter.

"I am, Dear Lord Lisnor,

"Yours truly,

"RONALD MACNAUGHTEN."

The comments made on this letter were, as may be supposed, most various. The earl seemed to treat it with the most indifference.

"Pooh, pooh, pooh!" he exclaimed, as he might have done at a tiff between two of his daughters, "it's nonsense to treat a matrimonial squabble with such ridiculous solemnity. Macnaughten is Scotch all over. He takes everything *au grand sérieux*. That minx Phyllis has boxed his ears, I suppose, and offended his dignity, so there is to be a regular smash-up, and a public scandal. But it must be prevented. I shall go up to town at once and see the two fools upon the subject. It's most annoying to have to leave home just as the hay is being carried —I have not a soul about the place who is fit to be trusted to see after such things. I wonder," continued Lord Lisnor, as a vision of too much cider being consumed, and too little work done, floated before his mind, "I wonder now if my presence is really necessary. I dare say it will blow over without my interference. It's only a lovers' quarrel after all. They are too fond of each other to mean it seriously."

"Oh, yes, papa, do go!" remonstrated Lady Helen.

"I am afraid it is more serious than you think. Phyllis said something to me about it, when she was down here, that made me fear for her married happiness. Pray go, papa, and as soon as you can. Ronald would never have written to you like that if he had not meant it. You know how slow he is to make up his mind, but when it *is* made up, he does not alter. He is not like dear Phyllis, who says a dozen different things in as many minutes. Do go this very day. *We* will look after the hay carrying, won't we, Aunt Kate? and see that everything is right. But all the hay-carrying in the world cannot be of so much consequence as Phyllis."

"Nelly is right, Lisnor," said his sister. "I am afraid this is a serious business, and you may be too late to do any good, if you do not go at once. You need not stay more than a night. I will see about the packing of your things, and I had better order the carriage to take you to Hillford in time for the two o'clock train. Will you be ready?"

"I suppose I must," grumbled the earl, "but it is excessively inconvenient. Who would have a family of daughters? Here, when I thought I had settled Phyllis comfortably in life, she chooses to kick over the traces. What on earth does the girl want? She had everything in conscience that a woman can desire—money, houses, a good-looking husband, and a brat to inherit—and she must needs chuck them all away for some silly whim. Well, if I can't patch it up between them, Phyllis must shift for herself in the future. For *I* can't help her. I've more than enough on my hands already, with five of you eating your heads off, and the crops worse and worse every year."

"Well, papa," replied Lady Camilla, "you needn't throw it into our teeth that we are still at Sedgeley Manor, 'eating our heads off,' as you kindly put it. It isn't by our own will, you may rest assured of that. We should have been off your hands long ago, if you had had a little worldly wisdom and not kept us cooped up in this hole, where there is never a man to be seen. What chance have we had to get married, I should like to know, unless we had elected to throw ourselves away

upon some paltry commoner, as Phyllis did. And a nice end this is to her fine marriage. You will most likely have her back again upon your hands as a grass widow."

"Here! let me get out of this!" exclaimed the earl, as he scrambled from the room; "six old maids talking his head off at the same time is too much for any man to endure. Kate! give an eye to my things, there's a good woman; and Nell, you come with me and I'll give you my orders about the haymakers."

And so saying, Lord Lisnor escaped from his tormentors, and was almost glad of the necessity that took him away from his haymaking, but at the same time from them. Unmarried daughters who have reached the thirties are apt to make their voices heard too eloquently about a household.

The earl's arrival in Hill Street, though unexpected, was hardly a surprise. Macnaughten had said to his wife, before posting his letter: "You must be prepared for this news bringing your father up to London," and she had replied:

"It would make no difference to me if it brought the whole family up." So that when the earl walked into her boudoir she received him with affection, but with no show of agitation or distress.

"Well, my dear! and what is this all about?" he inquired, as he seated himself.

"Did not Ronald explain it to you in his letter, papa?"

"Oh, yes! he told me that you had mutually agreed to separate, but I can't believe it."

"It is quite true, papa! We are only waiting until we have decided upon our plans. Ronald purposes going abroad, I believe, for a time, and I thought of going down to Sedgeley with Roy, until I have fixed upon a place of residence."

"But look here, my dear Phyllis, look here!" exclaimed the earl, "it must not be. It will be a public scandal—a disgrace. You must think of your sisters, my dear, and of me. We cannot have our names held up to ridicule and contempt, just because you choose to have a tiff with your husband. You must make it up

again, I insist upon it. Kiss and be friends. That is the proper thing to do. Separate! Nonsense! 'Those whom God hath joined together,' you know, 'let no man put asunder.'"

"My dear father, you don't understand these things. You have vegetated so long at Sedgeley that you are all behind the world. There is no disgrace in what Ronald and I propose to do. We cannot live together in peace. We do not share our tastes, nor ways, nor manners. We want our freedom. Is it not far better that we should live in separate houses than be a nuisance to each other? It is done every day—no one thinks anything of it. All that the world will say, will be, 'There goes another fashionable couple!' It isn't a divorce—not even a legal separation. We have simply agreed to differ."

"Then you have ceased to care for each other, I suppose. It is the usual ending of these violent love matches."

Lady Phyllis colored as she replied:

"I don't see what 'caring' has to do with it. I have not ceased to esteem my husband, and I am not aware that he has discovered anything particularly repulsive in me. Only, we are not suited to each other. His Scotch ideas are old-fashioned, prosy, and didactic. Mine run with the times. He would have all married women find their whole pleasure in the kitchen and the nursery—I aspire to something higher and more intellectual. *Voilà tout!*"

"Macnaughten is right and you are wrong——" commenced the earl.

"My dear father, if Macnaughten cannot convince me, you don't suppose that *you* will. Why, you are twice as prosy as he is; your ideas and mine are as wide apart as the spheres."

"Your mother, my dear Phyllis——"

"My poor mother, father, seems to have had no ideas beyond sticking down at Sedgeley and bringing children into the world which you did not want. I dare say she would have been horrified at my resolution, had she been here. *Mais autres temps, autres mœurs*, you know. We are not living in the year One."

"So it appears, my dear; still I can never give my consent to this separation. You know, Phyllis, that you had a hard task to gain my consent to your marriage; for notwithstanding his wealth and position, I did not consider Macnaughten a good enough match for you."

"Oh, that's nonsense!" interrupted his daughter. "Ronald is a gentleman; and a king cannot be more. I am quite contented with him on that score; indeed I think if you could get five other such husbands for my five sisters, you might consider yourself lucky. Ronald's birth has nothing to do with this decision. It rests solely on our mutual incapability to make each other happy."

"Then I absolutely oppose it," replied Lord Lisnor.

"I never thought of asking your consent, my dear father. It is a matter that concerns ourselves alone. And it is decided, once and forever. He would not have announced the fact to you, had it not been."

"Where is Macnaughten?" demanded the earl.

"In the house somewhere, I believe, but I will ring and inquire. It is some time now since we have taken our meals or accepted any engagements together," said Lady Phyllis, smiling, as she rang the bell.

"Is your master in the house?" she inquired of the footman who answered it.

"Yes, my lady—in the libery, my lady."

"Tell him that Lord Lisnor is in my boudoir and ask him if he will be so kind as to join us."

"Very good, my lady."

"A nice sort of marriage," Lord Lisnor groaned, as the servant disappeared.

"My dear father, it has not been a marriage for a long time past. You really must accustom yourself to that idea. It seems sudden to you, doubtless; but it has been threatening to end like this for months. Ah, here is Ronald!" continued Phyllis, as her husband entered the room. "Pray, Ronald, make my father understand that this resolution on our part is not a sudden one, but has been on the *tapis* for months past, and our present decision is but the culmination of it. I am afraid we have taken him too much by surprise."

"I should think it *was* a surprise, and a most unpleasant one," said Lord Lisnor, as he shook hands with his son-in-law. "I couldn't believe my eyes when I received your letter this morning, and I hastened to town in hopes of acting as a mediator between my daughter and yourself. But Phyllis tells me it is lost labor to attempt it, and that both your minds are irrevocably made up."

"They are," replied Macnaughten. "Lady Phyllis and I have come to the conclusion that it is the best thing we can do; and when one has decided on the best, one can hardly better it."

"But *is* it the best?" questioned the earl, "for a young couple like yourselves to separate? I should have said it was the very worst. How can a girl like Phyllis, only twenty-two, keep house properly by herself? There will be a worse scandal before long if you do not take care."

"Oh, no, no! I hope not—I am *sure* not!" exclaimed Macnaughten earnestly. "I can trust Phyllis implicitly with my honor and that of her child. Besides, she will have the protection of your name, Lord Lisnor, to appeal to, should anyone dare to question the reason for our separation."

"*I* will never sanction it. She need not appeal to me," said the earl.

"Oh, yes; you must! Phyllis wishes to go down for a short time to the Manor, and I think it will be her wisest plan and am sure you will not refuse to receive her. That fact alone will stop a great deal of gossip, should there threaten to be any. At the worst, it will be but a nine days' wonder. Such things are too common in this age. And no unpleasantness is to be put in comparison with our mutual happiness."

"Well, if it *is* to be, I suppose it is a waste of breath arguing with you both against it," groaned the earl. "I conclude you will make my daughter an allowance suitable to her rank, Macnaughten?"

At this apparent doubt, Lady Phyllis became indignant.

"Of *course* he will, papa. How can you allude to such a thing? Surely you might leave the provision for my

wants to my husband. He has never failed, at least, to give me everything that is necessary."

"Phyllis does me no more than justice, Lord Lisnor," said Macnaughten, with a faint smile. "Her requirements will always be my first care. We had already settled about that. I intend to allow her two thousand a year, unless she should find that she requires more. But she believes that will be sufficient."

"Ample," acquiesced his wife, "for I shall live quietly and only keep a brougham to go about in. I would not take a penny more, if you insisted on it."

"And when do you intend to separate?" inquired the earl, seeing that his advocacy was lost upon them. "If Phyllis wishes to reside at the Manor for a while, she had better return with me to-morrow. I cannot stay longer. The hay is not carried yet."

"Oh, it would be delightful to see the haymaking!" exclaimed Lady Phyllis; "I have not tossed a haycock for ages. And how Roy would enjoy it! *Can* I go to-morrow, Ronald? If Louise can get me ready in time, is there any reason that I should remain here any longer?"

"No possible reason in the world," replied Macnaughten slowly; "indeed I think it would be better if you were out of the house before I put it in the agents' hands."

"You mean to let it?" asked Lord Lisnor, with surprise.

"Only because Lady Phyllis declines to occupy it," returned Macnaughten. "I should have preferred her doing so, it would have looked better in every way. But she fancies it would be too large and lonely for her smaller establishment."

"Oh, yes!" interposed his wife, with a shudder. "I wouldn't stay here by myself. It was here we spent our honeymoon. When you have done with a thing, have done with it altogether. That's my motto. I couldn't settle down in this house by myself. I should always be expecting Ronald to walk in."

"Oh, avoid such a contingency, even in thought," cried Macnaughten, with a bitter laugh; "it would

destroy all your piece of mind. No, we have quite decided to let the house, Lord Lisnor, and seek new quarters, where we shall find nothing to remind us of the past."

"And my daughter will then return with me to-morrow?" said the earl.

"Yes, papa, I will," replied Phyllis. "I should like to take Roy into the country for the summer months, and it will give me time to think over my plans for the future. So, if you will stay with us for the night, I will accompany you to Sedgeley to-morrow afternoon. There is nothing left for me to do in London, now."

In saying this, it must not be supposed that Phyllis had forgotten her good intentions regarding Cissy Bernard. But all her efforts to discover her whereabouts had proved ineffectual. No one could tell her anything about her. Cissy had not communicated with her, and Captain Austin professed not to know anything about her—doubtless urged thereto by Cissy's fears lest her husband should pursue her to her hiding-place. So that Lady Phyllis had no clew to her little friend, and had decided that she must wait until Cissy summoned up courage to communicate with her. Her father was therefore shown to a room, and in due course dined with his daughter and son-in-law—this being the first time that Macnaughten had appeared at his wife's table for some months past. Lord Lisnor listened with surprise to the easy manner in which this young couple, so soon to be separated, presumably for life, conversed with him; showing no awkwardness or dislike toward each other, but remaining to all appearance on the most courteous and friendly terms. It was a new episode of fashionable life to the old man, and he listened to them with amazement. He could not conceive two persons who had sworn to live together for life parting, unless there had arisen a profound aversion between them, and to see Phyllis smile as she addressed her husband, and Macnaughten so assiduous in looking after her wants at table, made him wonder what was the necessity for a separation between them. When the meal was concluded, Macnaughten slipped out of the house on business of

his own, and Phyllis had a long talk in the drawing room with her father, after which, however, he did not feel much wiser than before. He lifted up his hands in amazement when she told him of the Pushahead Club and various other innovations of which he had never heard, and said the sooner she was in the country the better. The old man was tired, however, with his unusual exertions, and left her at an early hour, to dream of his haymaking and to wonder if his daughter Helen had carried out the instructions he had left with her.

Lady Phyllis was still sitting, reading by the soft lamplight, as it fell through a shade of crimson silk, when her husband re-entered the room.

"Has your father gone to bed?" he inquired.

"More than an hour ago. He is tired, I fancy, with his journey."

"I suspected it would be so—that is why I returned home. I thought I should like to say good-by to you when you were alone."

"Good-by?" she repeated interrogatively.

"Yes, I intend to leave the house to-night. I shall intrust you with my farewells to Lord Lisnor. I think he will sympathize with my feelings when I say that I would rather not remain here to see you quit the home to which I brought you. This is not a sickly sentimentality, but a feeling born of pride. My man packed my trunks to-day—I told him that I was going to Paris."

"And are you?" asked Phyllis.

"What can it signify to you to know? Our communications for the future had better pass through the hands of our solicitors. Then we shall feel quite sure of not being intruded upon by each other in our private dwellings."

"You need have no such fears about *me*," said Lady Phyllis, with a curled lip. "*I* am not likely to be desirous to disturb your domestic peace again."

"Just so!" returned her husband, unmoved. "But we may as well make assurance doubly sure. My solicitors, as you know, are Chippendale & Rule, of Lincoln's Inn Fields. They will have my orders to pay five hundred pounds into your bank each quarter day, and if

you want more, you have only to let me know through them and it shall be forwarded you at once. Shall you continue to bank with the London and County?"

"Yes."

"Have you ready money to go on with?"

"Yes, yes!" she answered impatiently.

"How much?"

"How tiresome you are!" she exclaimed. "How should I know! Thirty or forty pounds, I believe. Any way it will be plenty. What shall I want with money down at Sedgeley?"

"I should not like you to run short, nevertheless," he said gravely, as he took four notes from his pocket-book and laid them on the table; "there are fifty pounds more. If you do not actually require them for your own use, you will want to make your father and sisters some little presents in return for their kindness to you."

She had intended to reply to this speech with some pertness, but, before he had concluded, the consideration he was showing for her most trifling necessity made her ashamed of herself, and she took the notes with a low "Thank you."

"And do you mean to employ the same solicitors as your father?" was his next question.

"Yes, Mr. Arbuthnott of Chancery Lane," she said.

"Very good! Then, if there should be any need to write to you, I shall know where to send my letters. With regard to the child, it is settled between us, is it not? that Reynolds is to bring him to see me once a week, wind and weather permitting, at any place that I may appoint. I am afraid we shall not be able to keep our separation a secret from our servants, Phyllis," said Macnaughten wistfully.

"I never thought we could," she answered. "But how can I send Roy to see you while we are down at Sedgeley?"

"No, no! of course not—I could not expect it; and indeed I am not likely to be in London myself for some time."

She was curious to learn where he was going, but would

not let him think she took any interest in his proceedings, and so remained silent.

"When I am once more settled," resumed Macnaughten, after a pause, "I will let you know through Mr. Arbuthnott. Then of course I shall be anxious to see my little boy, and Reynolds can bring him each week to the house of my sister, Mrs. Dallas, in Delamere Gardens, to meet me."

"I suppose you would be afraid of Reynolds having some disagreeable *renconters* at your bachelor apartments," said Phyllis, "and reporting them to me."

"I think not," he answered gravely. "I think, Phyllis, you may trust me as fully as I trust you."

"Oh, yes! of course, I was only 'chaffing,'" said his wife, "you've always been a good enough boy in that respect, and I am quite willing to acknowledge it."

"Thanks," he replied, but in a tone which seemed to signify that the time was past when her opinion made any difference to him.

"And now," he resumed, approaching her and holding out his hand, "I will wish you good-by. You know the true meaning of that word, Phyllis, is 'God be with you.' I can say that from my heart, for I shall never wish less than happiness and health and peace of mind to the mother of my child. Good-by."

Lady Phyllis took his hand with a little hysterical sob.

"It is all very sad and a great pity," she answered, "but I am sure it is for the best. Partings are always sad, even between mere acquaintances—there is something solemn about them—but when we have got over this one, we shall be all the happier for it. Good-by, Ronald."

She gave his hand an involuntary squeeze, as she released it, and Macnaughten was sorely tempted to kiss the sweet, flushed face raised to him. But he had resolved that if this thing was to be done, it must be carried through in a businesslike and practical manner. So he said in a tone of affected cheerfulness:

"So that's over, and you won't forget my message to your father, will you? Don't let the old man think me churlish. Explain the reason of my leaving home to-

night to him, and give him my best wishes. Perhaps, when the grouse are about, he may feel like running down to Roxburgh for a week or so. I suppose it's not necessary for the whole family to cut me, because your ladyship has happened to change your mind. Well, once more, good-by."

And whistling to cover his distress, Ronald Macnaughten ran downstairs and shortly after left the house.

Lady Phyllis sat immovable for some time after he had gone. So it was over—really and truly over—and she was free once more to follow her own bent. It would be delightful work while at Sedgeley, planning what she could do, and where she should go, with her sister Nelly. But she could not help wondering where Ronald had gone for the night, and what he also intended to do. He might just as well have told her. It was like a man to keep it to himself. And he might have slept in his own house for the last night. What difference could it make? Where was the use of paying at a hotel when he had a home of his own? And as for not liking to see her leave, that was all affectation. Was he not as glad to regain his liberty as she was? Most likely he had some sinister motive for wishing to say good-by so soon. Some of his friends, his beloved Leytons, most likely—had asked him for the evening, and he thought her father might take umbrage at his passing his last hours from home. Men had always some underhand reason for what they did. He was bent on some pleasure of his own, in which she had no share. And the idea was sufficient to bring the tears of mortification into Lady Phyllis' eyes, though she told herself she was glad her husband had shown so little heart at the last, for it made their separation all the easier to bear.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE HAYFIELDS.

A WEEK after the events related in the last chapter we meet Lady Phyllis again, in her father's hayfields. How lovely and free from care she seemed, as she chased her little son round the haycocks, and smothered him in heaps of new-mown grass.

Lord Lisnor's estate consisted chiefly of pasturage land, and the haymaking and carrying were great events with him. It was the ten-acre lot that was being carried on this occasion, and the vast area was besprinkled by men and women with huge wooden rakes, with which they turned and tossed the sweet-smelling masses.

The earl was a stanch conservative in all things, and would have no newfangled inventions on his land. He affirmed that hay could never be so sweet when the grass was torn off by a mowing machine and raked up by rollers. Doubtless he was wrong, but gentlemen farmers are well-known to be very pig-headed in keeping to their own opinions.

The whole household was turned out into the field on these occasions ; the cook being the only creature left to minister to the comfort of her fellows, and even she made her appearance there, every now and then, between the intervals of cooking, armed with cans of cold tea and tankards of beer for the refreshment of the laborers.

Even the Ladies Powell did not disdain to take a rake and help in tossing the hay, and no one could have looked lovelier than Lady Phyllis Macnaughten, the pride of the flock, as with her chestnut hair surmounted by an old sun-bonnet of Lady Helen's, beneath which her flushed face was colored like the heart of a rose,

she wielded the heavy rake and laughed at her futile endeavors to turn the haycocks properly.

Roy, with Reynolds in attendance, kept close to her side, and every now and then she would fling down her rake, to catch her baby in her arms and cover his face with kisses. Roy was a sturdy young man of his age, who did not value these ebullitions of affection, but wriggled in his mother's arms and cried :

"Don't like tisses ! Come, mamma, race, race, race ! " and would set off running as fast as his fat legs would carry him, as soon as his feet touched the ground. And then Phyllis would chase the little monkey till she had run him to earth in a haycock, where they would sink down together, screaming with laughter.

Lord Lisnor, who was present, superintending all things, looked after the mother and child with a benevolent smile ; Lady Helen was also glad to see her dear Phyllis so gay—only Lady Winifred, who was standing near, had something unkind to say about them. Lady Winifred was the least good-looking of the sisters. She "favored his lordship" as the servants said ; had sandy hair and a pimply complexion, and was in consequence the most disposed to find fault with her more fortunate sister, Lady Phyllis.

"It appears to me to be most childish, not to say unbecoming, in Phyllis to make such an exhibition of herself with that child," she remarked sourly. "What is his nurse here for, if not to run about after him ? I think she might have a little more discretion. I dare say half the village knows the true story of her return to the Manor by this time, and she really might consider *us* a little."

"Would you have her not be happy then, even with her little child ?" demanded Lady Helen.

"By no means, but she surely need not romp all over the field like a great schoolgirl. I saw the bailiff looking at her just now, as if he couldn't believe his eyes. She should remember that she is next door to a widow, and if she does not regret the lamentable circumstance, she should profess to do so."

"You are talking nonsense, Winny," replied her sister.

"Of course she does not regret it. If she did, it would never have occurred. She appears to me to be quite happy ; much happier than when she came here last, and I hope she may continue so."

"Oh, everything that Phyllis does must be right in your eyes, Nell. I believe, if she had killed her husband, you would have said : 'Well, why shouldn't she, poor dear, if she felt inclined to ?'"

Lady Helen laughed at the ridiculous exaggeration.

"Draw it mild, Winny," she replied ; "you are too fond of passing your judgment on things, before you have heard the cause of them. How do we know all the trifles that have gone to make up the sum of Ronald's and Phyllis' dissatisfaction with each other and their married life? These are matters which no one can judge of properly except the parties concerned, so that I think we have no right to pass an opinion upon them."

"But that is just what I complain of, and so do we all," said Winifred, "that Phyllis is so secretive about it. She surely might give her own sisters her reasons for taking such a step—not too creditable an one, as even you must allow. It reflects in a measure upon us, and therefore we have a right to know the why and wherefore."

"I don't see that it is any business of yours at all. How do you know that Phyllis is not screening some fault of her husband's by her reticence ? that Ronald is not the one to blame, and that Phyllis is generously taking half the censure on her own shoulders. It would be just like her, if she did."

"Oh, of course you are on *her* side," replied Lady Winifred scornfully, as she recommenced tossing the hay. "You were always ready to take her whippings from a child. But, in this instance, I fancy you will get yourself into the same scrape if you go too far."

Just then Lady Phyllis ran up, breathless and rosy with her exertions.

"That boy will be the death of me, Nell," she exclaimed. "I am in a perfect fever."

"You look like it, Phyllis. You mustn't exert yourself so much. Let Reynolds look after Roy, and sit

down and rest. Will you have some buttermilk? We have a jugful here. It is so cooling when you are warm." She handed a glass to her sister as she spoke, and when Phyllis had drank it, she exclaimed:

"Oh, how *too* lovely the country is, after having been cooped up in town for so many months. Nell, I am half inclined to take a cottage here, and settle down near you, altogether. Wouldn't it be very peaceful and nice?"

"Very peaceful," replied Nell, laughing, "especially in the winter, when you can't walk out for the mud and the cart ruts; and there are no amusements of any sort, and you must light the lamps at four o'clock in the afternoon and yawn away the hours till bedtime. When even Rose's cantatas become a diversion, and Aunt Kate's reading of Shakspere a delight. No, Phyllis, dear, the country is charming in haytime, but I don't fancy you would enjoy it in winter."

Lady Phyllis sighed.

"Perhaps you are right; but sometimes I think that I should like having my own cows and pigs and cocks and hens. They must excite a certain interest and anxiety in one's breast, and so few things contain interest in this life. I envy people who work in hospitals, or superintend soup kitchens, or sit for the elections on school boards."

"But you have the working of your club to look after, Phyllis. It combines all sorts of usefulness, does it not?"

"Oh, yes; it professes to do so; but do you know, Nell, I have been a little disappointed in the Pushahead, because they seem to be able to do quite as well without me as with me. I don't mean just at this moment, because it is the recess and the committee will not sit again till September; but the whole system seems to be in the hands of two or three women, and the rest are simple nonentities. I imagined that we should have a voice in all matters pertaining to the ruling of the club, but I find it is a mere formality. The club itself is charming and all that could be desired, but it gives one no work to do, and what I want so much is work."

"You have a vote for everything, I suppose," said Nelly.

"Yes; but what is one vote against nineteen or twenty? Still, if they act up to their principles in succoring such of their sex as need their assistance, I am proud to lend my name to the cause."

"It seems a strange thing to me that a lady should belong to a club at all," remarked Lady Winifred, "and papa is of the same opinion."

"That is because neither papa nor you know anything about it," replied Phyllis. "There are several ladies' clubs in London now, and they are very highly thought of."

"But with very few women of your birth and connections belonging to them, I will undertake to say," said her sister.

Phyllis paused to think. Now that Winifred had started the idea she could not say that many, if any, titled women were members of the Pushahead or any other ladies' club. The names of Lady Matthew Winterton and Lady Alexander Fox were on the tip of her tongue, but she forbore to mention them. She knew how these women were thought of among their own class, and though the Ladies Powell were much behind the world in fashionable and social matters, they had Debrett's Peerage at their fingers' ends, and knew the history of every titled family in the United Kingdom. So Lady Phyllis held her tongue about her club associates, and saying that she really did not know, and did not care, proposed that Helen should take a little stroll with her round the hayfield.

The sisters made the circuit with their arms twined round each other's waists. Here was one of the best and purest affections of Lady Phyllis' life. Even her present circumstances seemed ameliorated by the fact that they had brought her once more within the ken of her younger sister. So long as she had Nelly and Roy, she told herself, she would never be wholly unhappy. Already, and though but a week parted from her husband, and that by her own consent, Phyllis was beginning to tell herself that there were ameliorations to her lot. She had expected certainly to feel more gay and at ease than she did; thoughts would intrude themselves upon her mind as to how Ronald was faring; if he missed her at all, or

regretted the decision at which they had mutually arrived. But she shook the feeling off by telling herself that it was occasioned solely by the novelty of her situation, and that as soon as she had become accustomed to the idea of living alone and being her own mistress, she should begin to realize the improvement in her life.

"Nelly, darling," she began, "I do feel it so good to be for a few weeks with you, that we may plot and plan together, where I shall settle down for the future, in what sort of house, and in what part of the town. I am in great hopes, dear, that it may concern you as well as myself. I am going to do all I can to persuade papa to let you come and live me. Do you think he will consent? Would it not be delightful?"

"More than delightful, dear Phyllis; *so* delightful, in fact, that I should be afraid to let my mind dwell on it from fear of disappointment."

"Oh, we will not think of that, but do our very best to gain his consent. It would be better for me to have someone to live with me than to live alone. People wouldn't talk so much then."

"Do you think that people *will* talk, Phyllis?" demanded Nelly timidly.

"My dear, when do they *not* talk; in town especially? Why, Reynolds told me only last evening that the fools in Sedgeley are all saying that Ronald has run away from me with some other woman. Poor, good Ronald! who, I honestly believe, has never looked at another woman in that way since he married me."

"It is very, very dreadful," said Lady Helen; "why will people always make the worst of everything instead of the best?"

"But see what a good example they have before them," remarked her sister. "See how suspicious Camilla and Winifred and all of them, except you, my dear, good Nelly, are of me and my proceedings. They 'pump' me whenever they have an opportunity. Even Aunt Kate is not free from curiosity to learn if there is not something worse beneath this separation than mutual incompatibility of temper. I know what they think—what, I was going to say, they *hope* to find—a Man!"

"Oh, no, no, Phyllis, don't say such an awful thing!" cried Lady Helen.

"I *do* say it, my dear. I don't mean that they would not be terribly shocked at the discovery; but they have an idea there must be something too disgraceful to be revealed, either on Ronald's part or mine, and that can only be something connected with the other sex. But they may look till Doomsday before they find anything, because it does not exist. They were always jealous of me and my marriage," continued Phyllis, "and I can see they are pleased to think that I have had a downfall, as they call it, and would like to see me lower yet. But I shall disappoint them, Nell. I shall be happier in the future than I have ever been before. Two thousand a year is not bad pin-money for baby and me, and I mean to enjoy myself upon it. But never one of them crosses my threshold except you, darling, and you will ever be as welcome there as the flowers in May."

"Dearest Phyllis," replied Helen, squeezing her arm, "and where do you propose living?"

"In a flat somewhere; near Kensington Gardens, I think, for Roy's sake. And I shall make it so pretty, Nell. I shall only have about half a dozen rooms, you know, but they shall be gems. I am going to put the whole of the furnishing into Liberty's hands. There is no one in London like him for good taste and elegance."

"But won't you feel rather lonely, dear," said Nell, "with only baby and the servants?"

"Only baby and the servants!" echoed Lady Phyllis; "Bless my soul, Nelly, what are you thinking of? Do you imagine I am going to shut myself up and pass the rest of my life like a hermit? No, indeed! that is not what I have got my liberty for; I mean to be the gayest of the gay. Why not? What is there to hinder me? I can see whom I like and go about with whom I like. I am my own mistress, thank Heaven! No one to grumble if poor little Cousin Percy lingers too long over afternoon tea, or Captain Herbert sends me tickets for the opera and asks if he may have the pleasure of escorting me there. No more black looks when I come back a few minutes late for dinner, or attend a committee meeting

when I am required at home. Oh! the loveliness of being a free agent—of being accountable to no one for your actions—it is the only desirable state on earth."

"It is a pity you ever married; isn't it, Phyllis?"

"My dear child! you forget my two thousand a year, to say nothing of Roy! You are quite mistaken. I would not have missed the delight of owning Roy for anything in the world. Besides, an unmarried woman has no status in society. How can an old maid (or a young one, for that matter?) have any fun by herself. She must always have a chaperon. But I am as good as a widow, and yet enjoy all the privileges of a *femme couverte.*"

"But—but"—said Nelly hesitatingly. "Don't be angry with me, Phyllis, darling—but doesn't it seem just a little unfair to take the money to enjoy one's self with, and—and—give him nothing in return? He loses nearly half his income for nothing—and *he might* have married a woman who would have lived with him, eh?"

Lady Phyllis was just in that humor when plain speaking considerably disagreed with her. She withdrew her arm, almost roughly, from her sister's waist, and commenced to walk more rapidly toward where the rest of the party stood.

"You have the most aggravating way, Nelly," she replied, "of saying unpleasant things at the wrong moments. Why should it be unfair? When Ronald married me he pledged himself to support me, and because he makes himself so disagreeable that I cannot live with him in peace and quietude is no reason that he should be let off doing his duty. It is *my* money as much as his—besides, if it were not so, he is bound to support his son, and he cannot take Roy from me, even if he wished to do so. The law provides against that. So that I really do not see where the unfairness comes in."

"Poor Ronald!" said Lady Helen, in a low voice.

"What do you say that for?" demanded her sister quickly.

"Because he loved little Roy so much, and it must be such a trial for him to give him up. And he loved you too, Phyllis, dearly—we used to laugh at him, poor fellow!

because he could not keep his eyes off you even at the dinner table. We have often said that we have never seen anybody so spoony as he was on you."

"Ah, well! you see you have not had much experience, so cannot be said to constitute the best of judges. Perhaps, the very effect of such intense spooniness is to make it evaporate all the sooner. Under any circumstances, it does not seem to last long. I do not know a single woman of my acquaintance who does not confess that she is sick of marriage. Men are so disappointing when you see them close—they are so selfish and *exigeant*—so arbitrary and interfering—that I fancy few loves survive the honeymoon. Anyway, mine has fled 'like a beautiful dream,'" concluded Lady Phyllis, with a hard laugh.

"I am so very, very sorry," said Lady Helen, with a sigh.

"By the way, Nelly, I made the acquaintance of a friend of yours just before I left town. Guess who it was."

"A friend of mine," repeated Nelly, astonished, "but I have no friends in London, Phyllis."

"Have you not? I think you are mistaken. At least this gentleman told me that he was a friend of yours, though we had no opportunity to discuss the matter further. But I invited him to visit me as soon as I return to town, and then we may become a little more confidential."

"You cannot mean—Mr. Arbuthnott!" said Lady Helen, growing crimson.

"I do then, and I admire your taste, Nell. Lady Fearon introduced him to me. He turns out to be the nephew of a great friend of hers, Mrs. Warrington——"

"Oh! his Aunt Dulcie!—such a dear, good woman," interrupted Nelly.

"So I understand, and I mean to cultivate her acquaintance when we meet in London. I cannot think why papa should make such strenuous objections to Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott. He is a rising man—Sir Richard Fearon thinks highly of his talents—he is making plenty of money, and will make much more. Lady Fearon tells

me it is quite a favor to get him to accept a brief, he has won so many difficult cases. He is young too for a successful barrister, not over thirty—very nice-looking and a gentleman. Papa ought to jump at him. Heaps of commoners marry titled women nowadays. Indeed, now that the aristocracy look out for nothing but American heiresses or singers, what are we to do? I am determined to bring papa round to my way of thinking before I leave Sedgeley—indeed, that was my chief reason for coming here."

Lady Helen did not answer, but she turned and embraced her sister affectionately.

They had nearly made the round of the field by this time, and reached the spot whence they had started, and the last feat which Lady Phyllis accomplished, was to take a running leap at a small haycock and clear it. A few adjacent haymakers laughed, not impudently but merrily, at the sight. Lady Winifred became indignantly reproachful.

"How *can* you do so unladylike a thing, Phyllis?" she exclaimed, "and all the laborers looking on the while. I am sure they have never seen one of us act in such a manner in their lives. It is quite an innovation in Sedgeley."

"So much the better for Sedgeley," replied Phyllis, who had no idea of being called to task by her unmarried sisters; "it wants innovations. Besides, what do I care if any of you have jumped over a haycock, or not? You can keep to your old-maidish ways if you like—I choose to follow my own."

"So it appears," said Lady Winifred dryly, "or you would not be here. But, under the circumstances, Phyllis, do you not think that a little decorum would be more appropriate? You are very much in the same position as a widow, remember."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" cried Phyllis irreverently; "widow indeed! Nothing half so good. If I were a widow, I should have all Ronald's money instead of a third. And if I were a widow, I should skip over two haycocks at once, so that's all you know about it."

"Your remarks are positively indecent!" murmured Lady Winifred as she returned to her haymaking.

At this juncture Lady Camilla approached them, flushed, angry, and full of complaints.

"Phyllis!" she commenced, in a forcible tone, "what am I to do about that maid of yours, Louise? Here, she is nearly hysterical, because it is Friday, and I have no fish for her dinner. It is most awkward having servants of different persuasion at the same table. Ours would not eat fish to save their lives. They consider it quite sufficient insult to be asked to sit down with a Papist."

"Let Louise take her dinner into the pantry," replied Phyllis curtly.

"But I have no fish for her! There is none to be had nearer than Hillford."

"Give her a couple of eggs then," said her sister; "we don't make any fuss over our servants in town. If they don't like what is put before them, they can go without."

"We never had a Papist in the house before you brought Louise here," remarked Camilla grumblingly.

"I wonder at your caring to keep one under your own roof, Phyllis," interposed Winifred; "the child might be tampered with and perverted to Popery before you know where you are. It is most unsafe. How do you know that she is not a female Jesuit, or a spy in the service of some of the cardinals. One can never be sure of Papists. Murder is justifiable in their eyes, so long as it is done for the sake of Holy Mother Church."

"Winifred, don't talk about what you know nothing of!" replied Phyllis impatiently. "Well, Reynolds! and what is it?" To the nurse.

"If you please, my lady, while Lady Camilla is on the subject, would you be so good as to tell her that I cannot allow Master Roy to eat pork, as it does not agree with him?"

"Very well. By the way, Camilla, can Roy have a little chicken, or something digestible for his dinner to-day? Pork doesn't suit him, and Reynolds objects to his eating it."

"Your servants generally do object to anything that may be set upon the Manor House table, Phyllis," remarked Camilla sourly, "but of course, if the child is

so sickly that he cannot digest ordinary food, something else must be procured for him."

"Begging your ladyship's pardon," interposed the indignant Reynolds, "Master Roy Macnaughten is anything but sickly. He's as fine a child of his age as you'll see anywhere, but *no* baby of three years old can eat pork and suchlike rich food with impunity. He never had it in his papa's house, nor he shan't nowhere, if I can prevent it."

"There, there, nurse, that will do!" exclaimed Phyllis. "You can't expect Lady Camilla to know all about babies. It would be highly improper if she did."

"I shall have to ask papa about the chickens," said Camilla, wisely ignoring the last sally, "for I don't know if he has any fit to kill. The spring chickens are over, and the pullets and capons are not yet put up for fattening. This is the laying time, you know."

"I will send into Hillford and buy a couple," said Lady Phyllis. "Pray, don't let there be any fuss about Roy's feeding. Cold mutton does as well for him as anything."

"It would hardly seem so, from the trouble he gives," muttered Lady Camilla, as she sauntered back to the Manor House.

"Nell, I shall very soon have had enough of this," whispered Phyllis in her sister's ear. "I cannot stand Camilla's and Winifred's continual fault-finding. They make such a trouble of everything! No one would imagine I was staying in my own father's house,"

"Oh, you mustn't leave us yet a while, darling!" replied Nelly sympathetically. "They are horrid, I know, but it is their way. They are never satisfied with anything. Camilla is growing a regular old maid. She saves every penny she can, and is always complaining that we eat too much, or winking at us not to take a second helping, for fear there will not be sufficient left to make another day's dinner."

"I'm afraid papa's affairs must be in a bad way, to necessitate so much economy," said Phyllis thoughtfully, "or does he know how Camilla goes on? I would rather

pay him for my keep while here than be subject to such remarks as she made just now."

"Oh, papa would never consent to that, Phyllis! He would be horrified at the mere idea, and ask if you mistook him for an innkeeper. But"—lowering her voice—"I do think sometimes that he is worried about money matters. You see, farming is such uncertain work, and when Mr. Arbuthnott was here I overheard some hints dropped about a failure in Mexican mines. I fancy papa's private income was in some mines. I wonder if they have gone to smash?"

"I wonder, too," said Phyllis; "also, if anything is wrong, that papa does not let Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott see about getting it righted, for, between you and me, I believe his father will never be good for much again, and I know nothing about Grant. Lady Fearon told me that old Arbuthnott had had a stroke of paralysis, or something of the sort, and the firm may be muddling the business away. I shall ask my father plump if anything is wrong, and why he does not make a greater friend of young Arbuthnott."

"Oh, Phyllis, how brave you are!" cried Nelly admiringly. "I wish that I had half your pluck."

"That comes of being married, my dear," replied her sister, laughing. "We shall see you plucky, too, when you shall have been Mrs. Arbuthnott for a couple of years."

"Your experience has not left me much pluck to become Mrs. Arbuthnott or Mrs. Anybody Else," said Nelly sadly.

The Ladies Powell seemed bent upon teasing their sister Phyllis, as if she had no right to re-enter her father's house, and was an intruder among them, much as the kittens of an earlier brood might receive a sister cat, born a few months later. They were still jealous of her lot. Two thousand a year for pin money seemed an enviable portion to them, even though it was not accompanied by the burden of a husband. Indeed, after the fashion of their sex, these young ladies, who had been so ready to depreciate their untitled brother-in-law, were quite as ready now to lament his loss, and to believe

their sister must have been in the wrong to let him go. They had been dreadfully afraid before that their ancient and unsullied name would suffer from connection with a commoner, and now they were afraid lest it should suffer from Phyllis having a separation from him. They declared that it would prove an insurmountable obstacle to their own marriages, and they should have to settle down for life as old maids, just because Phyllis chose to be so selfish and think of no one but herself. They had not yet been able to get at the root of the matter, and learn the true reason why Macnaughten and his wife had elected to part; the earl's monosyllabic replies, when they questioned him, being most unsatisfactory, and Lady Phyllis herself holding her tongue on the subject. But they were her sisters, they argued, and had a right to know, and so they gathered round her that evening, Lady Catherine included, determined not to let her go until she had told them the whole truth.

There was no need, in their estimation, to stand on any ceremony, and Lady Mary, who was more curious, if possible, than the rest, opened the ball abruptly:

"Phyllis, you have never had time, apparently, to tell us the history of your separation from Mr. Macnaughten. We wish you would do so now. We feel that you owe us an explanation of a matter which concerns us all."

"Does it?" said Lady Phyllis quietly. "In what way?"

"Well, in every way. Mr. Macnaughten is our brother-in-law as well as your husband."

"A brother-in-law whom you took every opportunity to run down and make little of," she replied.

Lady Mary tossed her head. She had a small button nose, like that of the earl, and when she tossed her head she did not look dignified.

"We certainly did not consider that you married your equal; no one could do *that*. Still you married him, and no wife should leave the protection of her husband without sufficient reason. Don't you agree with me, Aunt Kate?"

"Oh, certainly, my dear!" said Lady Catherine.

"Marriage is, as we all know, a very solemn obligation, and cannot be lightly thrown aside without grave scandal. I am sure our dear Phyllis must think the same."

"But who says that I have thrown it lightly aside?" asked Phyllis.

"Well," interposed Lady Camilla, "you give us all reason to think so when you return home without any satisfactory explanation why you have parted with your husband, whether it was his fault or yours, and whether it is for a time only or forever."

"There is no explanation to give," replied her sister lightly. "Ronald and I choose it shall be so, and, since it concerns no one but ourselves, I cannot acknowledge your right to demand one."

"But it *does* concern us," said Lady Winifred. "It might be very prejudicial to our own chance of marriage to have a sister in a position which is only next door to that of a *divorcée*. Men do not, as a rule, consent to part with half their fortunes and their wives at the same time unless there has been something unpleasant between them—something to be hushed up in order to prevent an open scandal."

Lady Phyllis' proud blood rushed to her face and brow, and she was about to retort angrily when Lady Helen interposed:

"I hardly think you can be aware of the insinuation conveyed by your words, Winifred. If there is anything to conceal, it is certainly not on Phyllis' side. She may be consenting to this separation in order to screen Ronald, but——"

"Stop, Nelly!" exclaimed Phyllis. "You are doing my husband an injustice by the suspicion. He has done nothing necessitating concealment; he has been a faithful husband to me from the day we married. No one shall say a word against him in my presence!"

"This partisanship makes the matter more mysterious than ever," observed Lady Mary.

"Perhaps so; but it is true. There is no reason whatever for our separation but one—we choose it shall be so. And that is the only reason that you will ever get out of me."

"Then we are to think what we like," said Camilla.

"Exactly, and I shall do what I like," replied her sister proudly. "There is not one of you here that has been married—I was going to say engaged—but I believe *you* were once engaged for three weeks, Camilla, to Lord Brereton, who jilted you for Dorothy Cheston, the actress. I was such a child at the time that the story only reached my ears in fitful whispers, but it *was* the case, was it not?"

But Lady Camilla's only answer was conveyed by her suddenly rising and quitting the apartment.

"How unkind of you to allude to poor Camilla's trouble," said Mary reproachfully; "and when you know that she has never forgotten that bad, faithless man!"

"Hasn't she really?" said Phyllis, with uplifted brows. "I am sure it is time she did. Lady Brereton has six children, I believe; but if I am unkind in mentioning an affair of years ago, how about her probing my wound of yesterday? Isn't that much more cruel?"

"Your *wound!*" said Winifred sarcastically. "When you were leaping sky-high over those haycocks this morning? No one who saw you, Phyllis, would believe that you were wounded, either in mind or body."

"Ah! that's the way the world judges," replied Phyllis, with mock seriousness. "People have different ways of expressing their grief, you see. Some take it out in weeping and sighing, *I* relieve mine by jumping over haycocks. I find it an immense relief to my feelings, a kind of mixture between crying and dancing."

"If you cannot speak of such things without levity, Phyllis," sniffed Lady Mary, "I think we had better not speak of them at all."

"You have arrived at it at last, have you?" exclaimed Lady Phyllis. "That is exactly what I have been driv- at all through—to make you hold your tongue. You must see plainly that I do not intend to repose any confidence in you, so that it is indelicate to try and extract it from me as you do. As Aunt Kate justly observed, marriage is a solemn thing, sacred to the people who engage in it, and not intended to be shared by the common crowd, so you must be content in this instance to

know the fact, and leave the cause alone. When Ronald and I meet, as doubtless we shall meet, at the houses of our mutual friends, he shall not have it in his power to taunt me with having spread the story of our little failure far and wide. And as for its interfering with your own marriages, I don't think you need be afraid of that, but should such a dilemma arise, just send the man to me, and I promise you he shall receive so satisfactory an explanation as to send him rejoicing away to buy the wedding ring at once."

Her sisters did not like the bold way in which she silenced them, but they had no remedy, so were compelled to submit, and to no one but Lady Helen did Phyllis ever confide the reason that she parted from Ronald Macnaughten.

CHAPTER XIX.

NELLY'S LOVER.

THE Ladies Powell, with the exception of Lady Catherine and Lady Helen, continued to make Phyllis' visit to Sedgeley Manor as unpleasant as they knew how; and notwithstanding that Roy was enjoying himself without measure in the hayfields, she determined to leave on the earliest opportunity and seek quarters elsewhere. But she had a deep design to accomplish first; one for which she would have endured more *désagreméns* than her sisters' sarcastic remarks and insinuations could afford her; and that was, if possible, to reconcile her father to Nelly marrying Mr. Arbuthnott.

Lady Phyllis was, as has been stated before, the earl's favorite daughter. He was proud of her beauty and intelligence, and there was a sympathy between them which did not exist between him and his elder children. So when Phyllis found that Camilla and Mary and the rest were resolved to make the house too hot to hold her, she took to wandering over the farm, linked to her father's arm, and doing her best to make him confide his money troubles, if any, in her.

One morning she led the conversation thus:

"You have a good many head of cattle this year, papa. Are all these for the London market?"

"Yes, my dear! The poor beasts are all destined to figure at the Christmas dinners. That's a beauty, with the black spots, isn't he? I think I must keep him for home consumption."

"You must make a lot of money by your farm, papa?"

The earl sighed.

"No, my dear; I wish I did. But what with rearing and fatting, there doesn't remain much profit for the

farmer. And it is so uncertain a game, into the bargain. I am glad I never dabbled in agriculture. The agriculturists have been complaining sadly this year. But pasturage is pretty certain, on the whole. I suppose I ought to be thankful that I have that to fall back upon." And again he sighed.

"Why do you sigh like that, dear old papsy?" asked his bonnie Phyllis, squeezing his arm and gazing up into his ruddy face. "Is anything wrong with the farm? or anything else? You're not sighing over *me*, I hope, as Camilla and Mary spend their days in doing."

"No, no, my darling!" said her father, laughing. "I think you're quite able to look after yourself, and so long as *you* don't sigh, I shall never waste any over you. What made you think of such a thing?"

"Because I don't like to think that you have any worse trouble than I have," replied his daughter. "There is nothing else to sigh for? is there, father?"

"Well, my dear! perhaps I am foolish to worry about them, but things might be better than they are with us at present. I will tell you in confidence, Phyllis, but don't let it go any farther, my dear—for if those silly geese inside got wind of it, they'd cackle it all over the village—that my silver mines in Mexico have proved a failure, or are likely to do so, from water getting into them or some disaster of that sort. And all my private fortune—little enough, my love—is locked up in those mines, the Coldstream, they're called; and not being able to see after matters myself, well! I really don't know how it will all end."

"But, father, you must have advice at once. What does Mr. Arbuthnott say about it?"

"Mr. Arbuthnott has been laid up for some months, I'm sorry to say, and there does not seem much likelihood of his getting about again. Sometimes I think I had better change my solicitors, for the other partners do not appear half sharp to me. And, as you say, if anything is to be done, I should have sound advice."

"But you know Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott, do you not, papa? old Arbuthnott's son?"

A frown immediately spread over the earl's features.

"I have met the young man, but I don't like him. He is an insufferable prig, puffed up in his own conceit. I would rather go by my own advice than his."

"Oh, you prejudiced old man!" cried Phyllis merrily. "Why, you must have looked at him with your eyes shut. He is one of the cleverest, most rising young barristers in town. My friend Sir Richard Fearon says he will live to sit upon the Woolsack."

"Indeed! on what premises does he go?"

"On his own judgment, papa, and the opinion of all London. Since the Torrington trial, Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott cannot accept the briefs that he is asked to hold. I don't know if he could act for you, but I am sure he could give you sound advice about this matter, and perhaps save your money into the bargain. You would not like to be entirely dependent on your farming; would you, papa?"

"Indeed I should not. It becomes less profitable every year. And, Phyllis (though I shouldn't like them to hear that I said so), it is a heavy burden to a man in my position to have five unmarried daughters on my hands. If I were alone, or had only one or two at home, we might get on well enough—but five, my dear, *five!* It is more than the fair share of any man."

"And yet, when you have an opportunity to get one of them taken off your hands, you show the poor man the door, papa," said Phyllis slyly.

"I don't know what you are alluding to, my dear," replied the earl, growing red.

"Oh, yes! you do, daddy, so it's no use denying it. Poor Nelly told me all about it, last time I was down here, and that is what determined me to make the acquaintance of Frederick Arbuthnott, and judge for myself. Now, why did you do it, papa? What possible objection can you have to this young man?"

"What possible objection?" began the earl, fuming; "a thousand objections. He has no birth, no name, no prospects, and no money. What more do you want? He is not a fit husband for your sister. It was like his insufferable impudence to ask me for her."

"You're wrong all round, papa. You got in such a

rage that you never stopped to make any inquiries about him. Mr. Arbuthnott is a gentleman; his mother was the daughter of Sir Edward Cowley—his aunt Mrs. Warrington is connected by marriage with the Thellusons and Bellalys' families. Of course he has no name yet—what man has at thirty—but he is rising rapidly. He is making plenty of money even now; enough to buy up our beggarly family, over and over again; and as for prospects, he is sole heir to his aunt's money, which is a tidy fortune, if not a colossal one. But, father, so long as a man has sufficient to keep your daughter in comfort, why should you make such a point of money? Why should you expect it? You have none to give with her. If my mother's father had been as particular, would you ever have married her? And after all, has it any effect upon happiness? Look at me. I made one of the wealthiest matches of the season, yet here I am—alone, with only the money to compensate me."

"Your own fault, my dear—entirely your own fault!" exclaimed Lord Lisnor.

"I believe Nelly would have been quite happy and contented with Mr. Arbuthnott," replied Lady Phyllis, ignoring her father's remark. "He is a good son and nephew, and an honorable, hard-working, clever man—what can anyone desire more? And you should consider Nelly, too, papa. You have made the poor girl very unhappy by your decision, and missed getting rid of one of your encumbrances."

The earl was silent, and Phyllis took advantage of his mood.

"There is another side to the question," she went on; "you are not immortal, daddy, dear; and though your children will keep you among them as long as ever they can, younger men than yourself die and leave their families unprovided for. If farming does not permit of any saving, and your silver mines are in so cranky a condition, what is to become of my sisters in case of your death? Aunt Catherine cannot be expected to maintain them. Her little income is barely sufficient for herself, but if there were two or three married ones among us, we might easily keep the rest. You have never allowed

me to have Nelly to stay with me, which is very short-sighted of you, for in my house she might have met several men better suited to your ideas of a son-in-law than Mr. Arbuthnott; but though I cannot keep the establishment I did my invitation to her is still open, if you will let her return to London with me. Now *do*, papa, for the girl's sake; let her come to me for a few months, and see what I can do for her. They have none of them ever had a chance, you know."

"Well! Phyllis, my dear, it is very good of you to think of your sisters in this way, and I will consider the matter before you leave us—I will indeed."

"But you must be prepared for one thing," continued Phyllis archly, "that I am not going to forbid Frederick Arbuthnott the house, just because Helen may be there. I don't want to deceive you, papa, and have a quarrel about it afterward, and so I tell you that she must take her chance. Perhaps he may never moot the subject of marriage to her again; you may have wounded his pride too much; you have a nasty way of putting things sometimes, you know; but if he does, and she accepts him, you must give your consent to their marriage; if not, I shall go and see them married in the nearest church myself, for I won't have Nelly's happiness trifled with. Better she should not visit me at all than that."

"You are a saucy jade, Phyllis," said the earl, half smiling, "and deserve a box on the ears for talking to your old father in this way. But I will think of it—I can't promise more than that. I will consider the matter carefully, for I confess you have put it in a more favorable light to me—and if your sister goes to stay with you, it shall be with my consent to do as she sees fit, in case of Mr. Arbuthnott renewing his proposals."

"That's a dear!" said Phyllis encouragingly, "though I'm not at all sure that he will ever broach the subject again. He is a Scotchman like my wretch, and Scotchmen, when once offended, are very hard to conciliate. But all this has nothing to do with your silver mines. Now, papa, do take my advice and consult someone with regard to them without delay. Just think what it would be, if you were to die unexpectedly and leave my poor

sisters penniless. Put your pride in your pocket and consult young Arbuthnott, or let me do so on your behalf. Will it require more money than you have by you at the moment? If so, let me lend it you, papa. I have far more than I want for my needs, and you can have a thousand if you like—Ronald will advance it me in a moment, if it will be of any use to you."

She looked into the earl's face, as she spoke, with her earnest eyes glistening with affection and anxiety, and he turned and kissed her pretty, flushed cheek.

"No, my darling!" he replied, with unwonted warmth, "thank you all the same for your generous offer. If money is required, old Arbuthnott will raise it for me, and under any circumstances I could not accept a favor from the man who has made my girl unhappy."

"Whom do you mean?" she cried quickly.

"Macnaughten, to be sure. Who else? You try to hide it, Phyllis, but I can see plainly that you are not so heedless of this affair as you pretend to be—that it is not so pleasant as you profess to find it, to be as good as widowed at two-and-twenty."

"Oh, papa, what a ridiculous mistake!" exclaimed Lady Phyllis, with a peal of laughter, "what will you say next? Why, I'm just as happy as the day is long. I am plotting, morning, noon and night, of the jolly use I shall make of my liberty as soon as I am settled in town again. I haven't had half enough fun in my life yet. I mean to run about like a girl let loose from school. You just wait and see."

"That is just what I mean to do—wait and see. I am sure you will not be able to endure this state of things for long. It is unnatural, unwomanly, and altogether wrong. But while it lasts, my girl, be careful for your own sake and Macnaughten's, and for the sake of your pure, good mother, who never had a thought beyond her husband and her children. Ah, Phyllis! I have often thought lately that if she had been spared to us, this would never have been."

"Dad," said Lady Phyllis, in a low voice, "am I making you unhappy?"

"I am not happy about it, my dear, and I cannot

say that I am. But doubtless you and Macnaughten know your own business best, and I would never interfere between man and wife. But it is all very different from what it was in my day."

Phyllis did not answer, but walked by the earl's side, thoughtful and silent. Presently she heard little Roy's voice as he raced over the daisy-besprinkled lawn with his nurse, shouting in his glee. She immediately expressed a desire to join her child. It seemed a relief to her, to get away from her father at that moment. So she waved the earl a smiling adieu, and ran away to join Roy.

Phyllis did not mention a word to Nelly of what had passed between her father and herself concerning Mr. Arbuthnott, but she did tell her that there was just a chance that she might have her as a visitor when she returned to London, and her sister became so excited at the mere idea that Phyllis was glad that she had not told her more. Lady Helen began to speak of all the people she was likely to meet there, and in the course of conversation, she lit upon the name of Mrs. Bernard.

Phyllis had not mentioned poor Cissy in the family circle, knowing well that she would receive but scant shrift at the hands of her elder sisters; but now that Nelly had introduced the subject, she told her in confidence of the sad fate of the poor little woman.

She related the story with more pity than blame for the principal actors concerned in it, and was taken by surprise at seeing the unqualified horror with which Nelly listened to it.

"Cissy, Cissy Brandon, whom we know—run away from her husband, and with another man!" she gasped, with dilated eyes. "Oh, no! Phyllis, you are joking with me; it is impossible—too horrible—you must have been deceived."

"Indeed I am not," replied her sister, "everybody knows it to be true. But I can't blame her, Nelly. The principal reason for this difference between Ronald and myself is that I took Cissy's part. She was most unhappy at home—she had no sympathy or affection, and a brutal husband who denied her the simplest pleasures

natural to her age—what would you have had the poor child do? She could not have gone on living a life like that. There was no other way open to her in order to escape. I consider she was forced into the situation, and that she was quite justified, under the circumstances, in acting as she did."

"Oh, Phyllis, Phyllis!" exclaimed Nelly, still in that voice of unaffected horror.

"My dear little goose, what a fuss to make about it! After all, right or wrong, every woman has the option of choosing her own life. If she suffers, she suffers alone—and no one has a right to interfere with her idea of happiness."

"Phyllis, that is false reasoning. There can be but one right way and one wrong. The choice is not left to us. God has pointed out the way in which we should go. Cissy has sinned terribly—terribly! It has shocked me more than I can say."

"My dear child, I had no notion you were such a Methodist. You will astonish some of the London ladies if you air such old-fashioned ideas before them. Of course it is wrong—very wrong, indeed—no one denies that; still, circumstances alter cases, and in this instance I consider there is a great mitigation of the offense in consequence of Colonel Bernard's cruelty to his wife."

"Nothing can alter sin," said Lady Helen gravely.

"You are quite right. I acknowledge that, but you will not find a single proof that God considers one sort of sin more iniquitous than another; so if we are to condemn every woman who leaves her husband, we should also, in order to be consistent, condemn every man who is unfaithful to his wife, or who drinks too much, or swears, or leads a dissolute life in any way."

"Of course. But don't people condemn them?"

"Oh, my dear innocent! you are too refreshing. Why you will trip over them in London at every step you take. Dissipated men and women: men who swear and gamble—women who lie and backbite—human creatures of all descriptions, who have no more thought of God in them, or honor, or charity, or religion, than the table we sit at. When I look at my acquaintance, and see what they are

and remember what they have done, poor little Cissy Bernard seems like a snow-white lamb beside them, though she *has* been silly enough to jump from the frying pan into the fire, by exchanging the protection of Colonel Bernard for that of Captain Austin."

"It is very shocking," repeated Nelly, "but their wickedness doesn't make Cissy's sin the less reprehensible."

"Come," said Lady Phyllis, after a pause, "let us talk of something else. I see that I must initiate you into such things more gradually, Nell; or you will refuse to stay with me at all. The devil is never so black as he's painted, you know, my dear; and in like manner, I may have depicted my friends as worse than they really are. You will see them before long, I hope, and then you can judge for yourself. We both know that there is at least one immaculate young man among them—Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott."

"Oh, Phyllis! if papa ever allows me to visit you, it will only be on condition that I never meet him."

"Do you think so? Well, perhaps you are right. But I do not intend to give Mr. Arbuthnott his *congé* all the same. He has been admitted to my house, and so long as he behaves himself, he will be welcome there. If you *do* come to me, Nelly, I will make it right with the pater some way."

"Oh, Phyllis, darling! if you only *could!*" exclaimed Lady Helen, in a fervor of gratitude.

CHAPTER XX.

LADY PHYLLIS RESIGNS.

In six weeks more Lady Phyllis Macnaughten left Sedgeley Manor for London, armed with a promise that, as soon as she was ready to receive her, Nelly should pay her a visit. She parted with her family in the highest spirits—delighted to leave the place which had been made so uncongenial to her, and wild at the prospect of being once more settled in a home of her own. She established herself at Harrington's Hotel until her arrangements should be completed, whence the following letter to her sister Helen will best show how she occupied herself.

"My Darling Nell:

"I have secured the loveliest flat you ever saw in your life, in the Kensington Palace Mansions. Eight good rooms, and only two hundred a year. It is dirt cheap, not half its real value, but Colonel Thelwick who occupied it has just lost his wife, and cannot bear the sight of the place, so was glad to get it off his hands at any sacrifice. He only had it done up last year for his marriage, and now she is gone and her baby, too. Isn't it sad? I have taken it for the remainder of the lease, six years, and am now in all the joyous throes of choosing my furniture. I find Ronald lodged a thousand pounds, instead of five hundred, at the bank for me this quarter. He wrote to Mr. Arbuthnott, saying that he had overlooked the fact that I should have to furnish again. Rather thoughtful of him, was it not? He has also sent my grand piano, davenport, private books, and various other knickknacks to Arbuthnott's care for me. I have put all draperies, lamps, glass, etc., into Liberty's hands

—the solid furniture will come from Maple's. I am now in a perfect fever to get it furnished, that I may take possession and gather my friends around me. Of course most of the fashionables are out of town, but the majority will return after this month. Oh ! by the way, I met Lady Fearon (who has just returned from Hastings with her children) to-day, and where do you think my lord and master has betaken himself ?—to Norway, yachting with his beloved Leytons. Did I not tell you he was just as pleased to get his liberty back again as I am? The first use he makes of it, you see, is to go on a trip of three or four months with his long-nosed *inamorata.* I always said he was 'spoons' on that woman—nothing wrong, you know, but he thinks she is a model of what the sex should be. No wonder he had had enough of poor me, for I am as different from Mrs. Leyton as chalk from cheese. I hope he'll enjoy mooning with her on deck these lovely nights, and angling for her sympathy for my misdeeds. Enough of so uninteresting a subject. My drawing room is to be furnished in amber and brown,—very becoming to *my* complexion, my dear, but I am not sure how it will agree with that of some of my friends,—the dining room in old oak, and my bedroom in pale blue. Roy is to be promoted to a cot in my dressing room, not only because I like to have the little man near me at night, but that I want to wean him from Reynolds, who would keep him a baby forever. My establishment will consist only of a footman, cook, housemaid, and Reynolds, as she is quite willing to do what I require in the way of dressing, and my room is limited, so—Camilla will rejoice to hear this—I have dismissed Louise. She was a lovely hairdresser, but rather a nuisance at times, so I am not sorry of the exchange, and if necessary, the housemaid can always take her turn with Roy. Am I not growing economical ? I shall have matriculated before long, to take turns with Camilla in ordering the Manor House dinners. Good-by, dear Nelly, I hope to have you with me before the month is over. I must break off now, as Percy Sefton is coming to dine with me and go to the theater afterward. Nothing but theaters to see in town at present. The

Pushahead is open as usual, but the committee does not reassemble till the end of the month.

"Ever your loving sister,

"PHYLLIS."

As Lady Phyllis was closing this letter, preparatory to sending it to the post, a waiter entered her room to announce Lord Percy Sefton, who followed on his heels. Phyllis came forward smiling, to welcome her cousin with an outstretched hand. This was the beginning of the exercise of her newly acquired liberty, the first time that she had met Lord Percy since her separation from her husband.

"How are you, Percy?" she commenced, "I am so pleased to see you. I hardly thought you would have returned to town yet. How is Aunt Meliora, and your father? I have only been back from Sedgeley a week. It was awfully stupid down there, I couldn't stand it any longer; besides I wanted to choose a flat for myself. I have got such a lovely one in Kensington Palace Mansions —I have just been writing to tell Nelly about it. But sit down, do. This is the first time we've met, since Ronald and I—separated, you know. Were you surprised to hear the news?"

"Then—then," stammered Lord Percy, "it is really true?"

"*True!* Of course it is. I thought you would have heard all about it, through your mother."

"I am—I am—very sorry indeed," again stammered her cousin.

"Sorry? What for?" said Lady Phyllis sharply. "You don't suppose we should have been such fools as to have consented to it, if it had not been what we wanted?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. Only I didn't know anything about it; it took me quite by surprise. I thought —we all thought—that you and Macnaughten were so comfortable together."

"Then you thought wrong," replied his cousin, "but pray let us drop the subject. I didn't invite you here this evening to join in a jeremiad over my departed

bliss. I mean to enjoy myself ever so much better without it, so does Mr. Macnaughten. He has already started on a yachting voyage with his *chère amie* Mrs. Leyton. Oh, you needn't look so shocked. The doctor her husband is of the party, but doubtless they will make a very amicable trio. But won't we have fun, now that we can have our own way, eh?"

"I always thought that you had it your own way pretty well," said stupid Lord Percy.

"That's all you know about it, Percy. But we can do just as we like now without dread of interference. I've half a mind to run over to Paris with you for a week. Wouldn't it be glorious? I would go under an alias, and then you could take me to see all the fun that ladies are so rigorously excluded from in general."

But Lord Percy Sefton did not see the joke at all. The proposition considerably alarmed him.

"You mustn't think of such a thing!" he exclaimed; "suppose it reached Macnaughten's ears, there would be a pretty mess! You will have to be very careful now that you are left alone, you know, and give no occasion for scandal. You are still so young that I wonder my uncle allows you to keep house by yourself. You will not be able to have half as much pleasure as when you were under the protection of your husband."

"That's all *you* know about it!" retorted Lady Phyllis, tossing her pretty head. "Why, I mean to be more dissipated than I have ever been in my life before. What is the good of being my own mistress, if I am not to go about *as* I choose, and with *whom* I choose. But if you are going to read me lectures, and be a bird of evil omen, I shall not ask you to escort me again. I believe you're afraid, Percy, that Ronald will return suddenly some day and break your head. I wouldn't be such a coward, if I were a man," continued Phyllis contemptuously, "but you need not trouble yourself about it. Captain Rashleigh or Lord Charteris will be only too glad to take your place. I only asked you to-night because you are my cousin, and I thought it might be better to make my first appearance in public as a grass-widow under the protection of one of my own family. But I will wire to

Rashleigh at once, if you like, and he will be here in time to accompany me to the theater."

"No, no!" urged the little lord; "of course it is better that you should go with me, and I shall always be glad to take you out, Phyllis—only Macnaughten is rather a jealous beggar, you know, so you will have to be very careful whom you favor with your company, or are seen with in public."

"*Bien obligé!* but you are mistaken," replied Phyllis. "Mr. Macnaughten and I perfectly understand each other on this and every point. We are to have our entire liberty, without any interference. We shall not even know where we severally reside, but communicate when necessary through our lawyers. He will go his way and I mine; otherwise I should not see the good of having a separation at all."

"And what does Uncle Lisnor say about it?" inquired Lord Percy, evidently still unsatisfied.

"Uncle Lisnor's opinion was not asked," returned Lady Phyllis; "the matter concerns only our two selves. However, there's the dinner gong, so let us terminate the interesting subject. We shall have plenty of opportunities to renew it; though, if you consult my wishes, you will not mention it again in my hearing."

When dinner was concluded they set off for the theater together, Lady Phyllis still noisily excited and gay, and Lord Percy rather more silent than usual. He had never been an interesting companion at the best of times, and that evening he seemed duller than theretofore. Phyllis sat well in the front of the box, commenting on all she saw and heard in a lively tone, but her cousin appeared rather to wish to pass unobserved and kept his chair in the shadow of the curtain, talking in monosyllabic whispers. Once or twice she rallied him on his stupidity and declared she was sorry she had not wired for Captain Rashleigh, after all; and then Lord Percy would make an effort to exert himself, but it invariably died away in silence.

Lady Phyllis wondered she had not perceived before how uninteresting his conversation was. There was no one in the house whom she knew. Town was still empty

of the society she moved in, and the regular company of the theater was on its provincial tour, so that the performance was second-rate and the drama stale.

"Haven't you had enough of this?" she asked her cousin when the curtain fell on the second act, and as he answered in the affirmative they rose to leave. As they drove past one of the brilliantly illuminated music halls, Lady Phyllis exclaimed:

"How I should love to go there! I must see a music hall some evening. It has always been my great ambition."

"You mustn't do it; you cannot do such a thing!" exclaimed Lord Percy, quite energetically for him. "It would be impossible—most improper. A woman of your position in a music hall! I never heard of such a thing. You would lose your character entirely."

"Oh, have no fears, Mr. Proper," laughed Phyllis. "I shall not ask *you* to accompany me, you may rest assured of that. I shall choose some young man with spirit. Why, you are such a wet blanket, you are enough to spoil anyone's pleasure. When *I* go to a music hall, I shall get a cavalier with a little more gumption in him, who will not pull a long face each time I open my mouth. I declare you have ruined the evening!"

"I'm sorry you think so, Phyllis, but I confess I am too grieved to find that this separation between you and Macnaughten is *un fait accompli*, to feel much disposed for amusement. We heard you had had a tiff, but never dreamed it could be as serious as this. Take my advice, Phyllis,—I know I am not a clever fellow, but I have an immense regard for our family name,—and make it up with Macnaughten. He's an awfully good fellow, take him all in all, and whether it is the case or not, your freedom will never compensate you for the loss of your husband's protection. A woman who lives separate from her husband is always looked on with suspicion, especially when she is as young and pretty as you are. People will say unkind things of you that will make your heart ache, and spiteful things that will drive you mad to think you have no remedy against them. You won't find this living alone all cakes and ale, take my word for

it, and the sooner you go back to your husband the better."

This serious advice, coming from one whom she had been accustomed to regard as next door to a simpleton, enraged Phyllis all the more, because, early as it was in the day, her heart had already whispered to her that she had made a mistake.

"If you knew how Ronald was in the habit of speaking of you," she exclaimed, "you would not be quite so ready to take up the cudgels in his behalf! He couldn't bear you. He never lost an opportunity of abusing you. You were the butt for half his animadversions against me, and had you not been my cousin, I believe he would have turned you out of the house."

In her annoyance at his taking her husband's part against herself Lady Phyllis had said more than was either kind or prudent to Lord Percy, and when she witnessed his distress at her words, she regretted she had uttered them. He was not brilliant, certainly, and he often did and said awkward things, but he was a gentleman at heart, and had never meant to annoy Macnaughten or anybody else. To hear his actions had been so misconstrued made his lips quiver and his eyes moist. He waited a moment in order to command his voice, before he said:

"What you have said has given me great pain, Phyllis. I had no idea Macnaughten thought so badly of me. Had I done so, you may be sure that I would never have entered his house. Why did you not give me a hint of it? I know I often say silly things, but it was all in a cousinly way, and I would have died sooner than have let your husband imagine that my feelings for you were anything more than friendly. I like him so much. He has always appeared such a perfect gentleman to me—and that he should have thought *I* could be such a cad—it hurts me more than I can say."

"Oh, nonsense, what does it signify?" cried his cousin. "All that sort of thing is past forever. I can do as I choose with regard to you or any man, and you can come to my house whenever you like. I give you *carte-blanche.* You are my cousin, and no one

can blame my preference for you. If they do, it will make no difference to me."

"No, thank you, Phyllis. I feel the kindness of your offer, but you have put it out of my power to accept it. After what you have told me of Macnaughten's dislike to me, I will not enter any house of which he is the master."

"*Master!* What are you talking of? The house is mine, and no one else's."

"Not while he pays for it, Phyllis," replied Lord Percy.

"Well, I never heard such a ridiculous idea in my life. I am not to receive you, my own cousin, in my own house, just because my husband said a few stupid things about your intimacy with me. You know that a jealous man never thinks what he is saying. He would have said the same of anyone whom he thought I liked."

"That makes no difference to me. Since his censure has fallen upon me, however unjustly, I will not do anything to merit it. I am sorry, Phyllis, but you must not expect to see me at this wonderful flat of yours. I must be content with meeting you at the houses of our mutual friends."

"Just as you please, *monsieur*," replied his cousin, in a tone of pique, "you may be quite sure that I shall not worry you on the subject. Come or stay away, just as suits you best. There will be plenty of better men ready to take your place."

"I have not the least doubt of that—and I hope they will be better than I am, in every way—better able to protect your good name and keep you from all danger. But be careful, Phyllis, for all our sakes.. You should live the life of a nun, now that you are all alone."

Lady Phyllis did not like these constant adjurations to be so careful of her good name and to avoid the appearance of evil. What on earth was the use of being free, if the only use she made of her freedom was to imprison herself again. And from Percy Sefton of all men! The cousin she had looked upon as a tame cat—on whom she had depended to be her "walking-stick"—to make himself useful when no one better was at hand—to have him

turn Mentor was more than her usually sweet temper could stand. She spoke quite sharply as she replied:

"A nun indeed! A pretty sort of nun *I* intend to be. Where on earth have you got these old-fashioned notions from—your grandmother? We women of the nineteenth century have not emancipated ourselves for nothing, I can assure you, Master Percy. We are quite capable of taking care of ourselves. You forget, I think, that you are talking to the vice president of the Pushahead."

Lord Percy gave a gesture of distaste.

"That horrid place! I had hoped, when you left town after the season, that you would have given it up. You should hear how *men* talk of those women, Phyllis. If you did, you would be ashamed to confess that you were one of them."

"Not at all. I shall never be ashamed to own that I am a champion for the rights of my sex. And as for what *men* say of us—a fig for their opinion. Of course they abuse us, and why? The reason is obvious. They are jealous of our independence. Anyone could see that with half an eye."

Lord Percy could not help laughing, though he felt sad.

"My *dear* Phyllis! you are really too absurd. Jealous! of what? That a number of old maids and a few silly married women have banded themselves together to be ridiculous? Do you think that the men want the old maids? Are there not women and to spare in the world? And as for *les autres*, I should say their husbands were only too glad to get them out of the house. It doesn't lead to happiness, you see, as in your own case. Under such circumstances, people feel they are better apart. And who suffers most in a matrimonial separation——"

"Not the wife!" interposed Phyllis quickly.

"Ah! you say so now, for you have not yet tasted the *désagrémens* of your position, but I will not accept your answer yet; I will come for it in a twelvemonth. But here is your hotel," said Lord Percy, as he jumped out of the carriage and offered her his hand in alighting. "Good-night, and God bless you!"

"You will come in and have a glass of champagne, or a whisky and soda, Percy?" she urged.

"No, thank you, Phyllis. Don't ask me. I can never accept your hospitality again, after what you told me to-night. I only wish you had said it months ago. I cannot bear to think I have placed myself in a false position with that true gentleman, Macnaughten."

"Well, I conclude, if he has not bolted for good, that he will return to England some day, and then you can put yourself right with him, if it so pleases you," said Lady Phyllis.

"I intend to do so," he replied, as he raised his hat and walked away.

Lady Phyllis did not feel satisfied as she reviewed the events of the evening. That her cousin should have presumed to lecture her on her intended mode of living was nothing compared to his resolution not to cross her threshold while she lived apart from her husband. She did not like either to remember the pained expression of his face when she so rudely blurted out the sentiments that Macnaughten had expressed regarding him. She had rather an affection for Lord Percy. He was silly and mediocre, but he was very kindly natured and had done her many a good turn. She had no idea that he would have felt so keenly the revelation that her husband had commented on his intimacy at their house ; but it had evidently wounded him to the quick. Most men would have been flattered by the suspicion, she thought, have taken advantage of it, perhaps, to be more familiar than before ; but this was not Lord Percy Sefton's idea of honor. She had made him unhappy and banished him from her home, and she felt a little unhappy herself in consequence. And his animadversions on her projected style of living rang in her ears, also, long after he had disappeared from her sight. She felt low-spirited and uncertain, not to say irritable. Reynolds did not know what had come to her usually light-hearted mistress, as she undressed her that night. She was regularly pettish, and received her little stories of how Master Roy had behaved in the bath, and what he had said on going to bed, with perfect indifference.

The next morning, however, brought a diversion. Lady Phyllis received a letter to say that the committee of

the Pushahead Club would hold its first autumnal meeting the following week. Here was balm in Gilead. She had forgotten the more serious duties that awaited her in her new life, or she would not have been so foolish as to let the opinion of a simpleton like Lord Percy disturb her mind. She awaited the opening day with impatience, and was in her chair almost before the appointed hour.

The ladies of the committee seemed pleased to have her back among them, and Lady Barton extended her a really affectionate welcome. Even Miss Vipan, the secretary, appeared to have forgotten their wordy encounters, and made Lady Phyllis feel sorry that they had ever taken place. One thing only made her sad as she entered the familiar portals, the remembrance of Cissy. Where she was, and what she was doing, were still mysteries to Phyllis, and she resolved that before she left the club that day she would make inquiries of the president and members, if they had seen or heard anything of their unfortunate sister. It was quite homelike to enter the committee room, and hear the warm greetings that met her on every side. All the ladies seemed to have heard of her separation from her husband, and congratulated her on her release.

"You have done the wisest thing in your life," said Miss Noble, who, as usual, took the lead in everything. "How any woman can suffer herself to be held in bondage to a man, beats me altogether. You will learn now, Lady Phyllis, what it is to *live*. You have the 'world before you, where to choose.' I consider you to be a very enviable woman."

"I consider myself so," returned Phyllis, smiling.

"I never knew what peace was until I had parted with Lord Matthew," said Lady Matthew Winterton, in her bass tones; "a man who spent his days and nights in strumming the piano and scraping the violin, in order to compose foolish love songs, which nobody sang. A man who ridiculed all my efforts to do him good and drank whiskies and sodas by the score. The annual bill at his spirit merchant's was too terrible. It's a wonder he has not drank himself into his grave long ago."

"How much wiser you would have both been, had you elected to remain as I am, a free woman," exclaimed Miss Noble. "Lady Barton, I think we should institute a medal or a brooch or something of the sort, as a badge for the members of this club who have freed themselves from the tyranny of men. The first order for those who, like myself, have successfully combated all attacks upon their liberty, and the second for such as, like our friends here, have emancipated themselves at a considerable cost of trouble and annoyance. What do you say? Would it not be rather *piquante?*"

"An admirable idea, Miss Noble," replied the president; "only I move that there shall be a third order for those who are merely members of the Pushahead at present, but who may be drawn on, by the good examples shown them, to emulate their friends. Who seconds the propositions?"

"All of us!" cried the ladies.

"The motion then is carried, *nem. con.*"

"Decidedly," replied Miss Noble. "We must design something, simple but bold, as soon as possible. I think an enamel flag with 'Forward' on it, as a breastpin, would be as pretty as anything. Gold and white for the unmarried members—gold and blue for the emancipated ones—and gold and red for the ordinary members. What do you say."

"Admirable! Capital! Nothing could be better!" came from the lips of the delighted committee. Lady Phyllis alone did not chime in with hearty acquiescence. She had never adopted the fashion of wearing men's shirts. Macnaughten had objected to them and asked her to leave such innovations to shopgirls, and said that they were never intended for women of fashion. So that a breastpin did not appeal to her as to the others.

"Don't you like the idea, Lady Phyllis?" asked Lady Alexander Fox, observing that she was silent.

"Oh, yes! I have no doubt that it would be very pretty; but I was thinking that I should not know where to put mine."

"Why, wear it in your tie, of course."

"But I never wear shirts or ties," objected Phyllis.

"I—I—don't like them for ladies; at least they don't become me."

"Well, you'll never be recognized as a Pushahead if you don't adopt them," said Miss Noble.

"What, am I to wear them if they don't become me?" asked Lady Phyllis.

"Miss Noble," interposed the president, "I think it is time that we proceeded to business. We have an extra quantity to get through after our recess. I think Miss Vipan has twenty or more applications for membership to lay before you. We have also a painful duty to perform. Shall we get through with that first?"

"Decidedly," answered Miss Noble, while Phyllis, who had removed her gloves and settled herself in her chair, looked up with curiosity to learn what the painful duty could be.

"Ladies of the committee," commenced the president, rising to address the company, "I have an unpleasant, but stringent duty before me, from which none of us must shrink. You have all heard of the sad event which has occurred to one of our members—an event which threatens to lower the tone of the club, and to tarnish the unblemished name of which we are justly proud. In such cases it is usual to recommend the erring member to resign, but in the case for consideration that course is rendered impossible, on account of no one being cognizant of her address. We have therefore decided to omit the usual formula and to expel her without further ceremony. This is not a subject for vote—it is the carrying out of one of our rules—therefore it is not necessary for me to do more than announce to you that the person known among us as Mrs. Cecil Bernard is hereby expelled from the Pushahead Club and her name scratched off the list of members."

"What? *Whom* did you say?" cried Phyllis, starting from her seat and addressing Lady Barton.

"Pray be seated, Lady Phyllis," replied the president, "there is no occasion for excitement on your part. You must have been prepared for this announcement. You cannot have supposed that, after what has passed, Mrs. Bernard would have been permitted to remain in the club."

"You have expelled her? She will be publicly disgraced?" exclaimed Phyllis interrogatively.

"Why, of course; what else did you expect?" said Miss Noble, with an unpleasant laugh. "Your question seems strange coming from the vice president of the club. Did you imagine that we should retain on our books a member who has disgraced herself as Mrs. Bernard has chosen to do?"

"But are we not banded together for that very purpose—to stand up for and protect those of our sex who require protection from the tyranny of men? Are we not pledged to assist them in their warfare against injustice? Is this the way to help them—to desert them as soon as they are in trouble—to run away and leave them to extricate themselves from the difficulties of their position—to expose them publicly and post their names as outcasts from our club and our sympathy?"

"Is Lady Phyllis Macnaughten really pleading the cause of Mrs. Bernard, who has left her husband for Captain Austin?" inquired the soft voice of Lady Alexander Fox.

"It would seem so!" said Miss Noble sarcastically.

"Lady Phyllis was always disposed to be too lenient to her friend's follies," interposed Miss Vipan.

"Oh, it is impossible that Lady Phyllis can intend to convey such an impression to the meeting," said Lady Barton. "You have misunderstood her meaning. No one with any delicacy could take the part of an abandoned woman like Mrs. Bernard."

At this epithet applied to the unfortunate Cissy, Phyllis' indignant blood rushed into her face and her temper rose with it.

"They have *not* misunderstood me, Lady Barton," she exclaimed, turning so as to face the president. "It is *I* who have misunderstood all of you; have misunderstood the purposes for which this club was founded; the regulations by which it is ruled. Mrs. Bernard is one of my earliest friends; under no circumstances would *I* desert her, or turn against her; still less did I expect to see it done by the ladies who compose the assembly before me now."

"Our vice president is pleased to be complimentary!" observed Miss Noble, biting her lip.

"Lady Phyllis, pray say no more. You cannot know what your words imply," exclaimed Lady Barton anxiously.

"Excuse me, madam," replied the girl, "I *do* know, and you must allow me to finish what I have to say. I claim the privilege in virtue of my office here as your vice president. I believed the Pushahead to have been instituted for the benefit of women who felt themselves oppressed by the other sex, to afford them assistance and kindly sympathy under their troubles. Which among you here present knows or has inquired into what cruelties and oppressions Mrs. Bernard had to encounter before she was driven, in desperation, to seek protection from her husband? I do not defend her; she has done a very wicked thing and a very foolish thing; but are *we* the ones to blame or to judge her? Who *are* we, when you come to consider the matter, that we should dare to take the law into our own hands regarding this poor child, young enough to be the daughter of most of the ladies present, and by our act declare her to be unfit to associate with us any longer?"

"Well, I'm sure," ejaculated Miss Noble, "I don't think we ever had such compliments paid to us before in the history of the Pushahead."

"Most invidious, very ill-timed, remarkably outspoken!" murmured Lady Alexander Fox.

"*I* call it libellous," sniffed the secretary viciously; "as good as saying that we are all rowing in the same boat."

"I think it would be a good thing for some here if they *were* rowing in the same boat as Mrs. Bernard, Miss Vipan," replied Phyllis, who had caught the words from the other end of the table; "*her* sin is at all events an open one. She has not stayed at home, eating her husband's bread and deceiving him the while. She has sinned, it is true, but she has sinned honestly, and she will reap the fruits of her folly. That is preferable to getting off scot-free on the shoulders of someone else's error."

"I do not understand to whom you can be alluding," said Lady Alexander, with most injudicious haste to fit the cap upon her own head.

As her shafts struck the target, one after another, Phyllis grew more bold to speak the truth. She foresaw already how this controversy must end, but the prospect did not dismay her. She could only think of poor little trembling Cissy, arraigned before this set of stern judges who had no pity for her youth and weakness; this assembly of middle-aged, hardened women, many of them with smirched pasts; and felt she must say what was in her heart, or she would suffocate. So when Lady Alexander said that she did not know to whom she was alluding, she attacked her at once.

"I am alluding to you for one, Lady Alexander. How *you*, with the case which took place between Lord Alexander and yourself fresh in the memories of all who read it, can have the face to try and hound this poor girl to her social death, beats me altogether. One would think, with your terrible experiences, you would be the first to try and find some extenuating circumstances in the fall of any other woman, considering the *fiasco* by which you maintain your own position. People have been very kind to you, since then—the Pushahead Club especially so; indeed, it was chiefly on that score that I made so sure it would succor my poor little friend. Had I not a right to think that where *you* were admitted, none would be shut out?"

"Lady Barton," cried Lady Alexander hysterically, "I have never been so insulted in my life."

"We are *all* insulted," added Miss Noble.

"*You* too, Miss Noble!" continued Phyllis, disregarding the president's endeavors to restore order. "I have a word to say to you also. "What is the good of your writing a book like 'The Revolt of the Harem,' if you are not prepared to carry out the sentiments which you express in it? You write of women who are oppressed and deceived, and driven to madness and suicide, on account of the iniquities of their husbands; you spare us no details, however revolting, nor hesitate to enter upon questions which have gained you the credit of having

experienced what you dilate upon ; yet, when a living specimen of your idealized heroines comes before your notice, you play the part of the Pharisee in the Bible and pass by on the other side. You want the world to weep over your fictitious characters and vow to befriend such unfortunates in real life, but when you meet them face to face, you gather up your skirts and thank God you are not as other women are. No more you ever will be, for men dislike you too much ever to afford you the opportunity. So there is not much virtue in your chastity, after all."

"I consider that no such indecent remarks have ever been given vent to in this room before," said Lady Matthew Winterton.

"Ladies ! ladies ! I really must call you to order," exclaimed the president. "Lady Phyllis, this attack on your fellow members is most unprecedented. I must request you will sit down."

But Phyllis was astride her hobby, and remained deaf to all entreaty.

"You, Lady Matthew," she went on hotly, "are extremely good, I have heard, to the unfortunate women of the *pavé ;* I think that you go so far as to ask them into your house to drink tea with you, that you may have an opportunity of remonstrating with them on their mode of life, and I admire you for it. But why not extend your charity to Cissy Bernard ? Is she not bad enough for you ; or would her reformation not prove a sufficient inducement for you to rescue her from the hands into which she has fallen ? Is it possible that, while you have no fear of being confounded with the women of the street, you are afraid of being known to take an interest in the misfortune of one of your own position in life ; that your desire to do good does not extend to exposing yourself to the suspicion that you do not sufficiently censure the downfall of a lady ? You will go out by night to seek your fallen sisters of the street, but you would not seek out Mrs. Bernard, wherever she may be, and raise her from the mire into which she has plunged herself."

"Most certainly not," answered Miss Noble, for the

rest ; "we will neither seek her out in her infamy, nor permit her to come among us again, you may rest assured of that, Lady Phyllis Macnaughten !"

"Then I shall leave you !" cried Phyllis ; "my name shall no longer be associated with women who act in a manner so contrary to their professions, who say one thing and do another. I resign my vice presidentship, I resign my membership, I belong no longer to the Push-ahead Club !"

"Dear Lady Phyllis, pray do not act so hastily," whispered the president in her ear ; "let me explain."

"There is no explanation, Lady Barton, that can satisfy me," replied Phyllis. "I joined your club under a total misapprehension. I thought you were a band of noble women, above the petty prejudices of your fellows ; I thought you were of one mind and intention, to right the wrongs and uphold the liberty of your sex—but I see that I was mistaken. You are no more noble, nor independent of public opinion, nor courageous enough to fly in the face of society, than any other women. You can talk a great deal and write a great deal, but when an opportunity is afforded you of showing what stuff you are made of, you slink out of the way like anybody else. You are as full of meanness and jealousy, and party spirit and backbiting, as the most despicable of your sex ; how can you profess, then, to lead women or teach the world what they can be and do ? Do you suppose that dressing like men, or riding on cycles, or cutting your hair short, will advance the interests of the feminine world ? It does but bring you into ridicule. Men have always said that women are the bitterest enemies of women ; that it is *we* who hound them down when they commit an error and prevent their regaining the position they have lost ; and they are right ! You want to force men to lead as strict lives as we are supposed to do, and to present themselves at the marriage altar with a clean past in their hands. But before you can persuade them to attain that height of morality you must show that you consider the crime no worse in a woman than a man. Since for every man who falls a woman must fall with him, the record is equal for both. When men lead

clean lives women must do the same ; why then should you treat them in a different manner ? If one rises, the other will rise, and not till then. While you treat men (although fallen) as you do to-day, you should treat women the same ; or better, since they are the weaker of the two. But I have finished ; I have said my last word among you. Your club is only a silly sham ; a weak imitation of the sex which you profess to despise—an assemblage of uncharitable and spiteful women. I say good-by to you."

With which Lady Phyllis gathered up her gloves, and with a haughty gesture turned to quit the room,

There was consternation among the ladies of the committee. They had considered the election of Lady Phyllis Macnaughten as rather a feather in their cap—they knew she was a woman who moved in good society —who had, moreover, an inconvenient habit of speaking her mind openly—and they dreaded the gossip she might raise by relating the reason of her forsaking them. Lady Barton took her hand, begged her not to go till she had heard what the members had to say—it was not fair to them, she urged, to refuse them the opportunity of answering her objections. Lady Phyllis yielded so far as to remain where she was, but she refused to reseat herself.

"There can be but one answer to what I have said," she replied. "Will they consent to let Mrs. Bernard's name remain on the list of club members ?"

"Impossible ! It would be a scandal. We could not countenance such an open disgrace !" exclaimed the ladies simultaneously.

"And I, as president, should not dare to allow it," said Lady Barton. "Come, dear Lady Phyllis ! think for a moment. Would Mr. Macnaughten sanction your continuing her acquaintance ?"

"No !" replied Phyllis firmly, "but you have taught me to disregard the prohibitions of my husband and to act for myself alone. Anyway, in this instance, I am decided. The only condition on which I could remain among you would be the reinstatement of Mrs. Bernard."

"That is entirely out of the question," said Lady Barton, upon which Phyllis bowed to the assembly and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER XXI

ON BOARD THE "EVALINE."

As soon as Ronald Macnaughten had ascertained that his wife had left London under the protection of her father, he placed his house in Hill Street in the agents' hands and sailed for Norway with his friends the Leytons, in the yacht "Evaline." They had perfect weather, the sea was like a vast lake of unruffled waters, and the party on board was composed chiefly of young, gay, and amiable people. Merriment and good will were the order of the day, and none were prepared to enjoy themselves more than Dr. and Mrs. Leyton. But the presence of their friend Macnaughten did not add to their pleasure. He alone of all on board seemed to take no part in the fun which went on around him. They had dances on deck each evening, in which even the Leytons, forgetting their sober ages and their big children at home, would join; and then Macnaughten, yielding to their entreaties and unwilling to be more of a wet blanket than possible, would dance also, and delight some girl by choosing her as his partner, and proving what an excellent waltzer he was. But as soon as the amusement was over he would retire to the smoking saloon, or sit on deck gazing out into the starry night, and looking so miserable that Mrs. Leyton's kind heart bled for him.

"Jack!" she would whisper to her husband, "I am almost sorry that we persuaded Mr. Macnaughten to join us. We had better have left him to his grouse. It makes me miserable to see him. Just look at him now. Does he not seem as if he were going to cut his throat? I cannot think why he ever consented to this separation, since it makes him so unhappy."

"Perhaps he had no choice," replied the doctor. "He

is very wretched, poor fellow! there is no doubt of that. If you will make yourself scarce, I will have a talk with him, and see if I can rouse him a little."

"That's a good broad hint," said his wife, laughing, as she ran off to join a group of her friends.

Dr. Leyton left his seat and approached the spot where Ronald had ensconced himself, just behind the wheel.

"Splendid night; isn't it, old chap?" he commenced, as he sat down beside him. "How bright the stars become as we near the North! I cannot conceive anything more perfectly enjoyable than a trip like this. Fine weather—good company—a tight little yacht—and an experienced skipper. Is it not charming? Confess now; are you not enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, perfectly!" answered Macnaughten mechanically.

"What are you doing then, here alone, when there are so many pretty girls playing bézique and singing songs in the saloon? No harm in mild flirtation on the open seas, you know. When the cat's away, the mice may play, eh?"

"I don't feel like playing," said his friend.

"Pooh, pooh! you mustn't think so much of this business, Ronald," replied the doctor kindly. "It 'll all blow over, man; see if it doesn't. A mere lovers' quarrel, take my word for it. You'll be as right as a trivet before you've been back in England two months."

"I don't think so; in fact, I am *sure* not. You don't know my wife, Jack, and I don't think you quite know *me*. We are both too proud to make the first step toward a reconciliation. Besides, what would be the use of it? We should quarrel again in a week. She is much too much bent on having her own way, and I on having mine. We never *did* get on together as you and Mrs. Leyton do. Sometimes I think you two must have been made for each other, you agree so wonderfully on every point."

"Nonsense, man! We differed as much as you and Lady Phyllis at first. We had quite different ideas, and wishes, and pursuits, when we married. But that was

before we became *friends.* Since that time we have never had a single dispute. We have grown together, until we really have but one mind and one desire—thank God for it!"

"Before you were *friends*," repeated Macnaughten, struck by the expression. "But surely to be lovers is better than to be merely friends."

The doctor laughed.

"Ah, my dear fellow! that's the mistake that most people make in contemplating marriage. A man thinks that if he loves a woman and she loves him, it is all that is necessary to insure a happy married life for both of them. Why, a man can love any woman who is young and pretty; and a woman will love any man who appears to love her. That is no love—it is sentiment, passion, whatever you like to call it—an instinct of nature, which kills itself by what it battens on, Ronald. I have seen a great many unhappy married people in my medical capacity, and I can assure you that the majority of them owe their unhappiness to seeing too much of each other. That is the great mistake of marriage, in my opinion. Seeing too little before marriage, and too much afterward! Love, so-called—soon ends in satiety, and satiety broods distaste."

"Good God!" cried Macnaughten, sitting upright and gazing into the doctor's face, "Phyllis said exactly the same thing to me once. She said she was getting tired of me."

"Precisely, and you may believe she spoke the truth. Women are very intuitive in such matters. You have doubtless sickened one another, with your eternal society. I remember your 'spoony' days, Ronald. I never did see a fellow so hard hit in my life,—you made a perfect fool of yourself,—and I predicted it would end in something like this, even then."

"I know I was a fool," murmured Macnaughten, in a low voice, "but I worshiped her."

"I dare say you did, and worship is all very well for a few weeks; but if you want a woman's respect you should control such ebullitions, or she will end by laughing at them. A man looks a great ass when he is in love, Ronald, and women are far cooler then we are. They

see the ludicrous side of our passion, while we imagine it is still a foretaste of the joys of heaven."

"How did you become friends, as you term it, with Mrs. Leyton?" demanded Macnaughten abruptly.

"Don't say as I term it, please. I intended you to accept my words in their fullest sense. You can be 'spoony' on half a dozen women, as I said before—and not be friends with one. Friendship is a much higher sentiment than love; it is everything combined, it is in fact the true union of man and woman—the dual spirit and body—the feeling which makes them *one.*"

"And you did not begin your married life with that feeling, then?" demanded Ronald.

"Most certainly not. No married couples do. How can they? What opportunity is given men before marriage to discover if the girls they fancy are likely to make them true and faithful friends for life? I married my dear wife as other men do. I loved her, as I said then; took a fancy for her, as I should say now; because I saw she was a sweet, good, amiable girl, obedient to her parents, with religious feeling and a steady character. But the first year we lived together, our happiness was in danger more than once. I was *exigeant* and uxorious. I wanted her always with me; would not take a meal without her; grumbled if she expressed a desire to visit her family without me; considered that I had married her for her companionship, and that it was her duty to remain always by my side. She was obedient to my wishes, but after a while I saw the bad effects of my selfishness in her growing apathy. She was getting sick of me, in fact—just as you say your pretty wife said she was of you—and no wonder. Are we gods, man, that we can hope, single-handed, to fill up the measure of a woman's existence? We may be the cleverest, most amusing creatures on the face of God's earth in public; but how soon, do you suppose, do our wives not know every joke, every good story, every exposition that we can give? *We* go out into the world, and see and hear all there is to be seen or heard. But we consider that the reflection of these good things must suffice for the mental appetites of the women we leave at home."

"I never saw the matter in that light before," said Macnaughten.

"Few husbands do, but most medical men can tell you what the women think of it. Wives are too much kept under; not allowed sufficient liberty in choosing their own friends, own occupations, own ways of doing and ordering things. No one hates the innovations which have crept into society of late years more than I do. I allude to the clubs, and societies, and public occupations that ladies have taken to, but it is *we* who are at the bottom of it all—we, with our determination to govern their lives, and make their laws, and superintend all their amusements and duties. We have not treated our women as rational creatures; the consequence is, they have become, in many instances, irrational. Oh, there is a great deal to be said on their side, Macnaughten. I am a man, but I am all for the women and their wrongs. I have seen so much, in my professional capacity, of the domestic tyranny and cruelty to which they are subjected, often under the name of Love—that sometimes I feel that I *hate* my own sex, if only for the way they treat the other. Had you seen women, as I have, in many instances, *killed* by bearing too many children, and daily ruined in health and spirits from the same cause—treated with less consideration by their husbands than they would treat a valuable horse or dog, you would say, as I do, that their lot in marriage is often a very hard one, in which they have no choice, but are compelled to submit to whatever the ignorance or brutality of their masters chooses for them. But if a man's wife is his friend, it is impossible that either could take advantage of the other."

"But tell me, Jack," urged his companion, "how did you make your wife into your friend?"

"The change began in myself. One day I had been attending a wealthy patient, who was suffering from low spirits and bad appetite. I saw at once that what she needed was change; that she had been shutting herself up too much at home, and wanted fresh air and more cheerful society. I told her what I considered she should do, and she immediately consented to take my

advice. I returned home the same afternoon and found my poor Sophy with red rims to her eyes. I taxed her with having indulged in crying, and she confessed to being a little low-spirited and weary—she didn't know why, there was no cause for it, she supposed it was the weather, or some trifling ailment—and it was not worth my notice. But I thought about it a great deal. I recalled how much she had stayed indoors of late because I was occupied and could not go out with her, and did not like her walking alone. I remembered that I had left her to dine two days following by herself, when probably she had not thought it worth while to look after her own comfort—and I questioned if I had any right to think such a course would agree with my wife better than with Lady Bagshot. In consequence I insisted on her going down to her father's house for a fortnight, and during her absence held some severe catechisms on my own conduct as a husband toward her, and came to the conclusion that I had been a selfish beast, and under the guise of affection had pretty well robbed her young life of all its brightness. She came home after her little outing as fresh as a flower, and then I told her what I had been thinking of, and implored her to treat me as a friend thenceforward; not to pander to my selfish feelings if they were in the least contrary to her own. I was never so happy as I have been since then. The change did not come all at once, but as I told you before, confidence begat confidence and we grew together, day by day, until now I verily believe we *think* together. We never have a differing word; but at the same time we never have the slightest hesitation in expressing our opinions to each other, or in pursuing our own way. For instance if, on reaching land, Sophy were to say to me, 'I would rather stay on the yacht,' I should not dream of persuading her go ashore; and if I were the one to wish to be left alone, I should take no offense if she accompanied her friends. But the funny part is that now we have agreed to be perfectly free of one another, we very seldom wish to part. Indeed, nothing but duty ever makes us do so. Sophy is the most devoted wife and mother that I know, and the truest friend—I do not

believe she has a thought of which I am not cognizant—but for all that, I acknowledge that she is an independent being, who is only too good to devote so much of her time to me; and I treat her as such."

"You are the happiest couple I know," sighed Macnaughten.

"And you may be the other, if you choose," replied his friend.

"I did not stint my wife of her liberty, Jack. The fact of her belonging to that hateful Pushahead Club, the very name of which I detest, is a proof of that."

"Ah, my dear boy, but that was wrong. I do not say that because our wives should be our best friends, we are to let them run their necks into danger, without remonstrance. If you saw Lady Phyllis about to mount a vicious horse, would you not be justified in restraining her? But had you made her your friend, she would never have wished to associate her name with such a place. Why did she want to get her head? Because the curb was too tight. If you had driven her with a snaffle—excuse the simile—she would have gone more quietly. But there's plenty of time for that. Just think over what I have said, and I believe you will see that I am right."

"I see it already, Jack. But I never dreamed that people who love each other as Phyllis and I once loved *could* have too much of each other's company. If husband and wife are to be one——"

"My dear fellow, in that sense, you can never make two people one. You must leave them their individuality. You cannot mold their tastes and ideas in exactly the same groove. If you could, the effect would be very disappointing. There would be no sharpening of wits, no exchange of ideas, no help on either side for the other. Their spirits may be one—their minds and bodies, never. Now, look here, Ronald. Have you not often met with brothers and sisters, or friends, who have had but one home throughout their lives, and contrived to live happily and peacefully with each other? I have met with many such, and been charmed with the perfect harmony in which they dwelt together. Why can so few

husbands and wives do the same? You know that married life is more often a failure than not. The reason is because they exhaust each other, body and soul. They are, as a rule, so jealous, so *exigeants*, so uxorious, that they mutually weary of the monotony of their existence. A man does not like his wife's friends, perhaps. Were they his sister's friends, he would simply avoid them—being his wife's, he orders her to know them no more, or they shall quarrel. Is this justice? Is it treating a woman like a reasonable creature, with her own likes and dislikes? Is it allowing her to have any tastes of her own? In the same manner a certain place perhaps agrees with her, but it doesn't suit him. Is she to be deprived of the change which will best restore her health, or he forced to spend his holidays in one which affords him no pleasure? And let me tell you here, Ronald, that an occasional separation is the very best recipe for preserving the feelings of married people fresh and untainted. Husbands and wives should make a point of parting now and then, for policy's sake. There is a deal of sober truth hidden under the plea of Gilbert's peccant lover in 'The Trial by Jury,' when he says that 'One cannot eat mutton all day.' I have traced many a case of infidelity to the fact of the parties seeing too much of one another."

"And sometimes to their not seeing enough of one another," interposed Macnaughten, with a sad smile.

"Exactly so. Extremes are always a mistake. But when either men or women are doomed to hear the same sentiments, the same stories, the same details, day after day, they are apt to fancy the first person they meet interesting, if only from the force of novelty. You know how that works with our sex, Ronald. We come up from the country, and think every painted and powdered beauty we see in town delightful. We go down from London, and fall head over ears in love with the first dairymaid we encounter. Variety is charming, under all circumstances. And I find married people as a rule far too careless about keeping the love they have gained. They imagine that, once securely married, their fancies are fettered with their hands. Never was there a greater

mistake. It is *then* we have to put forth all our powers, to prevent the glamour of love vanishing on a closer inspection. It is then we have to exert, not only our affection, but our wisdom, our unselfishness, to use our eyes and ears, that nothing that threatens to destroy our new-found happiness may steal upon us unawares. Marriage is not all honey, Ronald. No state of life is. But when two true friends embark on the journey, their mutual affection produces harmony, for the simple reason that each would rather yield his or her desire than see a cloud on the brow of the other."

"You have put things in an entirely new light to me, Jack. How I wish you had spoken to me like this before."

"Better late than never!" replied the doctor.

"It is altogether too late for me," said Macnaughten gloomily. "However, I will try and shake myself together and not worry you with my megrims any longer. It's no use crying over spilled milk, is it?"

At this juncture, Mrs. Leyton came up to their side.

"What are you two conspirators plotting?" she demanded. "Jack, they are talking about getting up some private theatricals on board. Will you act?"

"My dear girl, you know that I cannot speak two lines correctly. What would be the good of me? But I can be prompter, or scene shifter, or lend my valuable services in any other humble capacity. But here is Ronald, who was always our *jeune premier* at college. Why not enlist him?"

"Oh, Mr. Macnaughten, will you really help us?" exclaimed Mrs. Leyton. "We were just wondering who would do for the lover. All the others are so old."

"Complimentary to me!" quoth Leyton.

"You goose! have you not just said that you can't act; and from what I remember of your attempts at charades with the children, I can quite believe you."

"You rude woman! Fancy exposing your husband's weaknesses in that way."

"I am not going to say my husband can do a thing when he can't, just because he *is* my husband, Jack."

"Quite right, Sophy. Tell truth and shame the devil."

"But will Mr. Macnaughten join us?" she pleaded.

"Certainly he will. What else has he come here for, except to make himself agreeable. I prescribe it for him," said the doctor.

"Now, Jack, you promised me we should not have one word of 'shop' during the trip. I'll fine you, if you mention anything about prescriptions again."

"What a bully you are for a man to be tied to! Perhaps you won't get Macnaughten without."

"I mean to try, at all events. Come along, *jeune premier!* Miss Alice Tresswell and Miss Chilton are all on tenterhooks to learn if you will join our party. They'll be pulling caps for the part of the lady you're to make love to. Jack, I'm going to have a lover, too. A middle-aged one, but he will have to make love properly, all the same."

"I don't care who you make love to, you jade, so long as you don't worry me," laughed the doctor.

"Oh, but I am going to worry you, all the same. You must arrange the scenery for us, and teach us our parts. Now, throw that nasty cigar into the water, and come along with me. They are all waiting for you in the saloon."

And with the two gentlemen in tow, she took her way back to the cabin.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE ALHAMBRA.

As soon as Liberty and Maple had done their part in fitting up the flat in Kensington Palace Mansions, Lady Phyllis Macnaughten took possession of her new home, and for a few days was too much occupied in unpacking her property, forwarded by Mr. Arbuthnott, and in admiring her pretty rooms, to have any time to spare for lamenting over the termination of her connection with the Pushahead Club.

Her beautiful piano, by Erard, had arrived, and her *marquetrie* davenport, and all her own books, which Ronald had had bound for her when they were first married. While unpacking a box of ornaments which had graced her boudoir in Hill Street she suddenly came upon an exquisitely painted photograph of her husband, one of his first gifts to her. It was so unexpected that it seemed almost as if she had met Ronald himself coming round a corner, and Phyllis felt her hand tremble as she held it. The picture represented a young man in shooting costume, with lithe, long limbs and handsome features, and he was smiling so naturally and saucily at her that it gave her pain to regard him.

"That is how he *used* to look," she thought, "in the old days, when we cared for one another. Ah, well! they are past now, and I have no wish to keep a reminder of them always before my eyes. He had better return whence he came. The man this represents is no longer in existence."

She wrapped the portrait in the covering from which she had unrolled it, but, after a moment's consideration, took it out again and placed it on the mantelshelf.

"Perhaps it will be as well to let it remain there, after

all," she said to herself. "People are so kind they may not believe that I have a husband if they don't see some evidence of the fact."

But she put it far backward, where it could not catch her eye each time she glanced that way.

As she was thus occupied her servant announced that Mrs. Warrington was outside, but refused to come in if her presence would be in the least inconvenient. Lady Phyllis jumped up from her employment at once, dashed her hand suspiciously across her eyes, and desired that Mrs. Warrington should be shown in without delay. She had only met this lady once before, but the interview had greatly impressed her. Mrs. Warrington was a quiet, unostentatious gentlewoman, without the least pretensions to goodness, and yet doing her work of charity by stealth every hour of the day. She spoke little of religion, yet practiced it in every action of her life. She never blamed the deeds of others, while her own were as pure and sinless as a mortal's could be.

She also had taken a fancy for this lovely, heedless girl at first sight, and longed to help her in the difficult path she had chosen for herself, and when she heard from Lady Fearon that she had separated from her husband, she resolved to cultivate her acquaintance, and, if possible, bring them together again.

She entered the room with an apology for being there at all.

"My dear Lady Phyllis, will you forgive me for intruding upon you at this time of confusion? It looks unwarrantable in a stranger. But I really did not intend to do more than call and ask after you. I had no hope of being admitted; and I will run away at once, if my presence here is inconvenient."

"Not at all!" cried Phyllis heartily, as she arose from among the open cases. "I was just unpacking some of my old possessions, forwarded from my solicitors. You know how one comes to love one's books and knick-knacks, and welcome them back like old friends. But I shall be so pleased if you will stop amid this chaos and have some tea with me."

"There is nothing I should like better. It is quite

chilly this afternoon. But it must be on condition that I do not interrupt your work. If you will go on with your unpacking, I will sit here and watch you."

Having ordered tea, the ladies were left alone.

"What lovely rooms you have here!" exclaimed Mrs. Warrington admiringly. "I do not think I ever saw a more exquisite chandelier. It is Venetian glass, is it not? Is that an heirloom, Lady Phyllis?"

Phyllis laughed.

"No, indeed, Mrs. Warrington. That magician Liberty found it for me. He has done all the decorative part of the furnishing. Is not that majolica flower-stand lovely? I have not made the acquaintance of half my new possessions yet. I go round the rooms like a stranger, finding out fresh beauties at every turn. I like those silver sconces fixed in the wall so much! I told Liberty I wouldn't have gas. It hurts my eyes to read by it at night."

"And do you read much?" inquired Mrs. Warrington.

"*Assez bien*," replied Phyllis, shrugging her shoulders; "but I have not much time for it. The days fly so quickly, and I generally spend the evenings at the theater or receptions."

"Do you?" said her friend, with the slightest possible elevation of her eyebrows, as though the admission surprised her.

"Why, yes. What should I do else? It would be very lonely—I mean stupid," said Phyllis, correcting herself, "staying at home by myself."

"Naturally, poor child!" rejoined Mrs. Warrington compassionately; and then, looking at the portrait of Macnaughten on the mantelshelf, she added: "What a singularly handsome young man! Is this a relation, Lady Phyllis?"

"That?" said Phyllis, reddening. "Oh, that is—is—Mr. Macnaughten—my husband!"

"Indeed!" said the other gravely. She had evidently expected to find the recreant husband a stern or disagreeable looking individual; while here was a face full of sweet gravity and feeling—the face, she felt sure, of a man capable of good, if not good already.

At that moment Roy, who had managed to elude the vigilance of Reynolds, who was busy setting things to rights, burst into the room without any ceremony.

"Roy, Roy, who gave you leave to come in here?" cried Lady Phyllis reprovingly. But Roy stood his ground, gazing at the stranger.

"Oh, the dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Warrington, with sudden animation. "Is that your little boy, Lady Phyllis? Pray, let me look at him."

"Yes, that is my naughty boy," said Phyllis, dragging forward the lusty, rosy child with evident pride and pleasure. "There is not such another tyrant in all London, Mrs. Warrington. He rules his poor nurse and mother with a rod of iron, but somehow they like it, all the same."

"I can quite understand that," replied Mrs. Warrington, who was gazing at Roy with the tears in her eyes. "I cannot tell you how the sight of this little one moves me, Lady Phyllis. He reminds me so powerfully of my boy in heaven! Did Lady Fearon ever tell you that I had a little son once and lost him?"

"No, never. How sad!"

"It nearly broke my heart at the time," resumed Mrs. Warrington; "but doubtless it was for the best. That was what first turned my attention to tending the children of the poor—that made me adopt my nephew. The blank was too horrible! If I had not had some engrossing occupation I should have gone out of my mind. Your little Roy is so like what my Edward was. Just the same stalwart limbs and bonny rosy face. Yet he slipped from my grasp in a few hours."

"I am so sorry!" murmured Lady Phyllis.

"It was the croup," went on Mrs. Warrington, in a low voice. "Just a walk on a mild spring day, a little cough and fever, and he was gone! Yet it was God's will, and nothing can alter that. He permitted the trial, to turn my thoughts to better things."

She kissed the little boy tenderly, almost solemnly, on his fair, open brow, and Phyllis led him from the room again and delivered him over to his nurse. When she returned her visitor had regained her equanimity.

"Talking of my nephew, Lady Phyllis," she commenced, "reminds me of the real object of my visit to you. Have you heard that he has gone down to Sedgeley, by Lord Lisnor's request, to consult with him about his Mexican property?"

"No, indeed," replied Phyllis joyfully; "but I am very glad to hear it. My father was speaking to me the other day, when I was down there, of his silver mines, which appear to be going wrong, and I strongly advised him to consult Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott. I am glad to hear he has taken my advice."

"I don't think he could have chosen anyone more likely to advise him well than Frederick," said Mrs. Warrington, "for he has had some experience that way. He went out to the Argentine Republic for a gentleman two years ago, and was most successful. Indeed, he was so charmed with the country that I was half afraid he would settle there, and was only too thankful to see him home again."

"You would not like to part with him, then," said Phyllis, smiling.

"Part with Frederick!" exclaimed Mrs. Warrington eagerly, "no, indeed! Why, he is the greatest worldly comfort I have. No one knows how good and unselfish and true that young man is but myself. I don't believe there is a more upright, conscientious, honorable creature in the world."

"That is high praise," remarked Phyllis.

"No praise could be too high for him," rejoined her companion. "But I must not trespass on your time any longer, Lady Phyllis. May I hope that some day, when you have nothing better to do, you will look in upon my little hospital?"

"I will, Mrs. Warrington; I should like to do so," replied Phyllis cordially.

"And," said Mrs. Warrington, as she took the girl's hand, and looked earnestly into her beautiful face, "I shall not forget you, my dear; rest assured of that. I shall pray for you often."

And before Phyllis could answer her she was gone.

At first the young woman had been rather anxious that

she should not prolong her visit, for she was expecting Captain Rashleigh every minute in order to take her to the Alhambra, but her last words had made her feel serious, and she almost wished she had not made the engagement. She had attained her wish at last, to visit a music hall, but the flavor had been taken out of the proceeding. When Captain Rashleigh was announced half an hour later she was almost cross with him, and said, in the course of the *tête-à-tête* dinner that succeeded, that she had not quite made up her mind about it.

"Oh, come, I say!" exclaimed the captain, who had not grown more deferential toward her since she had become a grass-widow; "that's not fair, Lady Phyllis, you know. I had no end of a bother to get the box; it's on the grand tier, and I can't let you waste it, by Jove! You must come now, if only to please me."

"Well, if you put it that way, Captain Rashleigh, I suppose I must, but I don't expect to enjoy myself, so I give you fair warning. I am afraid music halls are not quite the places for women with any serious intentions in life."

"Serious intentions in life!" echoed Captain Rashleigh, with a waggish look. "Oh, come, Lady Phyllis! that's too much, you know. *You* with serious intentions! That's quite an anomaly, confess now."

"And why should I not have serious intentions, Captain Rashleigh? Life has not been all honey to me, I assure you."

"I fancy you must manage to extract as much honey from it as most people," replied her companion, still unconvinced.

"That's all you know about it then," said Phyllis petulantly.

Captain Rashleigh was a man from the idea of a close intimacy with whom she would have shrunk with aversion; he was neither clever, deep-thinking, nor artistic. She had consented to accompany him to the Alhambra more from bravado than anything else, but before they had reached the theater she was sick of him. Mrs. Warrington's mention of her dead child kept echoing in her ears, and made her wonder what she should do if a

similar misfortune befell her with Roy ; and the thought of Roy mingled somehow with that of his father, and she wandered in fancy to the coast of Norway, while she wondered what Ronald could possibly see in that dowdy Mrs. Leyton to make a couple of months spent in her society endurable.

"What is the matter with you?" inquired her companion presently. "Are you not enjoying yourself, Lady Phyllis?"

"Extremely, thank you! Never more so," replied Phyllis, in a languid voice.

"Will you lunch with me to-morrow, and go to the Exhibition afterward? It does not close till next month."

"I shall be delighted," she said.

"Oh, by the way," exclaimed Rashleigh, "I suppose you know that Macnaughten has returned to town."

All the blood in Phyllis' body seemed to rush into her face, as she bent low over her programme and murmured :

"I had not heard it. We do not take much interest in each other's movements, you know. Where is he staying?"

"That I can't tell you, but I met him in Bond Street yesterday afternoon. He seemed to me to be looking uncommonly well. Norway has agreed with him ; eh, Lady Phyllis? We only exchanged a couple of words, and I didn't mention *this* little engagement to him, you may be sure."

The tone of his speech offended his listener.

"There was no reason that you should not have done so," she answered haughtily. "My husband and I may elect to live in separate houses, but I shall never do anything that I should mind his hearing."

"Oh, no ; of course not ! You quite mistook my meaning," responded the captain, in some confusion.

"Hateful man!" thought Phyllis, as he deposited her at the door of her flat and took himself away. "I'll take good care this is the last time *he* ever escorts me anywhere. How dared he speak as if I had made a clandestine assignation with him—ugly, red-haired creature ! I'll tell John to say I'm not at home next time he calls."

Very few men would feel flattered could they hear the disparaging comments passed on their abilities and appearance by the unfair sex, when their backs are turned. Women are so greedy of admiration and attention that they will accept both from men whom they utterly despise. But the latter are, as a rule, too conceited to be able to see through the dissimulation practiced on them. They imagine the mere fact of being men entitles them to any amount of adulation on the part of the weaker portion of creation.

As Lady Phyllis entered her beautiful rooms that evening, they looked very empty and unhome-like to her, though she could hardly say why. She felt cross and out of sorts, and refused the refreshments the footman offered her as pettishly as a naughty child. She went to bed with her head full of one idea ; Ronald was in London, actually within a few miles of her, and yet they had not met. How strange and unnatural it seemed ! But that was only because the notion was so new ; the feeling would wear off with time, and she would think of him no more than she did of Captain Rashleigh, or any other man. She dismissed Reynolds to her bed as soon as she could, but sat in her chair, long after the servant had left her, wrapped in thought, with her eyes fixed upon vacancy. When she rose, it was to walk into the dressing room, which adjoined her bedroom, and gaze at Roy, lying fast asleep, with his naked limbs uncovered, like a living Cupid.

"Oh, my little boy, my little child," thought Lady Phyllis, "what should I do if I lost you!" To see her standing there beside her child's cot, with her long hair streaming down her shoulders, the tears in her eyes, and almost a prayerful expression on her beautiful face, one would have hardly recognized the girl who had spent the evening at a music hall with a man who was actually distasteful to her.

Does the anomaly appear too startling to my readers ? Then they cannot know what a woman is, nor how variable her many moods. "*Souvent femme varie*," says a French poet, and our English Pope wrote, "Woman's at best a contradiction still." And strange to say, it is

the true woman, the man's woman, who is like that; as variable as the wind, and never two seconds in the same mood. The woman who may be depended on for saying the right thing at the right moment may be very good, but she is never interesting. It is the uncertainty of woman that lends her her chief charm. I can see the elderly and steady ones shaking their heads over the statement, but the fact remains. The women who enchain men longest are the women who lead them such a dance that they never know what the witches may do or say next.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

AFTER this little episode Phyllis began to feel rather uneasy. The knowledge that her husband was so near her, and yet she could not see him, harassed her. She was afraid to leave the flat lest she should meet him, and yet, as she drove out, her eyes searched the pavements on either side, in expectation of the event. She would have been happier could she have had her sister Helen with her at that crisis, but Nelly was unable to leave home just yet. Her letters were rather mysterious, though penned with a light heart. Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott was staying at Sedgeley and going over the silver-mine plans with the earl daily, and—Nelly did not say anything more, but Phyllis could guess the rest. Lord Lisnor would never have invited the young barrister to stay at the Manor, unless he had made up his mind on a more important subject than mines. So Phyllis was easy about her sister—though she had already begun to sigh a little for herself. A few more days brought evidence that Captain Rashleigh's information was correct, in the shape of a letter from Macnaughten, sent through her solicitors, to intimate that he had returned to town, and should like to see Roy on a certain day in the following week. When the day arrived, Phyllis saw her little boy dressed in his best and dispatched under the charge of Reynolds to the house of his aunt, Mrs. Dallas. She dreaded what the servant might tell her on her return—she felt as if she could listen to nothing concerning Ronald from a third party with complacency. So when the nurse began with the usual twaddle of how "Master Roy, he behaved so beautiful when he see his papa," etc., Phyllis stopped her at once.

"Please to understand, Reynolds, that I never wish to hear of anything that takes place in Delamere Gardens, nor do I wish you to speak of our doings while there. Master Roy goes there merely to visit Mr. Macnaughten, and your business begins and ends with taking him and bringing him home again."

And Reynolds, abashed, replied; "Oh, of course, my lady—if it is your wish, my lady!" and carried off her charge to the nursery.

One morning as Phyllis was sitting at her late breakfast, having been at a party the night before, the footman announced that a lady wished to speak to her. Phyllis raised her eyebrows as she repeated:

"*A lady?* But what is her name, John?"

"I don't know, my lady. The lady said you would know her when you see her, but she wouldn't give no name."

"Ask her business with me. I cannot possibly admit anyone without hearing what she comes for."

The man disappeared again, but in another moment brought her a torn scrap of paper on which was scribbled the word, "Cissy." Phyllis gave vent to an exclamation of delight.

"Show the lady in at once, John!" and then, as Mrs. Bernard made her appearance, she flew into her arms, exclaiming:

"Oh, my dear Cissy! is this really you? I have been longing to see you again. Where have you hidden yourself all this time? Come in, dear, and sit down and tell me all about it. There is no bar to our meeting now, thank goodness! This is my own flat, and you can come to it as often as you choose."

But Cissy made no return to this cordial greeting. The servant had left them together, but she looked around the room in a fearful, uncertain manner, and rather put her friend from her than encouraged her caresses.

"Hush, Phyllis! not so loud, or someone might hear you. I feel your kindness, dear, but I cannot accept it. I will not even sit down in your room. You see that I was ashamed to send in my name."

"But, my dear, that is nonsense. Why should you

object, if I do not? I shall never turn against you, my poor Cissy. Besides, I am free to do as I choose now, in all things. I am separated from Mr. Macnaughten."

"Yes, yes! I have heard it, or I should not be here. Oh, Phyllis! go back to him before it is too late. It is so dangerous for a young woman to live apart from her husband. And people are talking unkindly about you, even now. I have come here this morning for that purpose only—to beg you to make it up with Mr. Macnaughten before it is too late."

But Lady Phyllis drew herself up proudly.

"It is already too late. The deed of separation was signed months ago. And I wonder at your counseling such a step, Cissy—you, who were so miserable in your married life that you felt compelled to leave it at all risks. Is it possible that you have already repented?"

"No, no!" replied Mrs. Bernard hurriedly, "of course not—at least I don't think I have. Jack is awfully good to me—and I couldn't have stayed with the colonel, to save my life. Only, only—I have often thought since that it was an evil that might have been avoided. Surely, surely—there must have been some other way out of it. Government, who provides for the necessities of most of the people, might give a little more attention to the sufferings of women who have no way but one out of a miserable marriage. Ah! how I suffered—how I suffered!" said Cissy, with a convulsive shudder.

Phyllis drew her little friend to the light. She was very much altered. The small face, always so childlike, was now almost pinched with pain. The large dark eyes had evidently shed many tears, from the purple rings that underlay them. Her complexion was almost ghastly in its pallor, and she shrank from observation like a beaten dog.

"My dear Cissy!" cried Phyllis compassionately, "you are not happy, and you look very ill. Is there anything the matter with you? Surely, Captain Austin is sufficiently well off to give you all that you require."

Cissy laughed. It was painful to see her laugh. It was like a smile on the face of a starved corpse.

"Oh, yes, dear; I have all that I can require, and I

am well enough in health, though a doctor *did* tell me the other day that I am on the highroad to a consumption. But it isn't that ! It's seeing how I have pulled Jack down. He has had to leave his regiment, Phyllis, and none of his people will receive him, because of me. And it tells on him. He is a good-hearted fellow and will not reproach me, but I can see it all the same. He has not half the spirits he used to have, and he scarcely ever goes anywhere. As for *me*, I am of course a pariah. And the divorce cannot come on till next spring. It seems such an eternity to wait."

"But Captain Austin will mary you then, Cissy, dear, and then it will be all right. You must have patience. I am so glad to hear that he is good to you."

"Oh, yes ! he is good to me—very good," replied Cissy, with a pathetic smile. "But, oh, Phyllis ! take warning. Don't bring yourself down to my level. Go back to your husband—he was never cruel to you as mine was—and ask him to take you back before things have gone too far."

"My dear child, you don't know what you are talking of. I don't *want* to go back to him. I like my liberty too well. There are different sorts of cruelty, Cissy. It is not necessary for a man to beat a woman, to break her heart."

"But you loved each other so," urged Mrs. Bernard.

"Everybody seems to know more about that than I do," exclaimed Lady Phyllis, with an air of vexation. "I really do not think we did. We thought so, doubtless—everybody does, at first—but it soon melted away, and now, we are much happier apart than together. I have been having a 'high old time' in England, while my gentleman has been on the sea with his beloved friends the Leytons. It would disappoint us exceedingly to live together again."

"I don't believe it, Phyllis," said Cissy doggedly. "I don't believe that you even *think* yourselves happy apart. I expect you found your life monotonous, and you mistook that for misery. Monotony is the curse of marriage, Phyllis. It is seldom real misery that people feel. It is infinite boredom—the being chained, day after day,

and night after night, to the companionship of one man or one woman. Life requires variety to be life. If only we could trust each other more, love would live so much longer than it does."

"Mine is dead enough—dead as a doornail," said Lady Phyllis, with a hard laugh.

"I don't believe it," repeated Cissy; "I think it is only sleeping. Wake it up, dear Phyllis. Don't try to live the rest of your life alone. Think what a long one it may be. And at the last comes a lonely, desolate old age. Make your mind up that it shall cease. See Mr. Macnaughten when he comes back from Norway."

"He is back already. Roy went to see him last week."

"Then write to him. I only came to say that one thing. Stop these scandalous tongues that are lying away your fair fame, and go back to your husband."

"*Never!*" cried Lady Phyllis emphatically, "never!"

"Promise me to think over it," urged Mrs. Bernard earnestly. "I cannot bear to think of the many temptation that will come in your way, my dear, kind, beautiful Phyllis. And for your little boy's sake, too—how will you feel if he is taken from you just as he begins to be interesting and to know what his mother's love for him means?"

Phyllis' lip quivered, as she replied:

"I will at least promise you to think of it, but there is not the least chance of either I or Mr. Macnaughten changing our minds. But don't go yet, dear. Stay and share my breakfast. It is not yet twelve."

"No, dear Phyllis; thank you. Someone might come in. I am awfully frightened of being seen nowadays, even by a servant," said Cissy, with her pitiful little laugh, "and I never go anywhere—indeed this is the first time I have ventured out of doors for three weeks."

"Well, you must come to see me sometimes, or I shall be angry with you. Have you been to the Pushahead Club?"

Cissy's big eyes opened wide with surprise at the question.

"As if I *should*," she said. "But I met Miss Vipan a

few weeks back and she told me I had been expelled. Did you hear that, Phyllis?"

"I did, Cissy, and I left the club in consequence. Its practice differs too widely from its preaching for me. I did not care to belong to it any longer."

"I was half sorry when you joined it," said her friend. "Jack always said you looked like a bird of Paradise among a lot of crows. He would not let me belong to it now, even if they would have me."

"And where do you live, Cissy?"

"I shall not tell you," said Cissy, shaking her curly head; "because you must not visit me—I will not let you. If times are ever better, perhaps, my dear, good faithful friend, I may—I don't say I shall—take advantage of your goodness to me. But now good-by. I know what Jack will say when I tell him of all you have said to me—that you are an angel."

"I am afraid Jack's ideas of angels then must have been taken from the pictures of the little devils with horns and tails," replied Lady Phyllis, laughing as she kissed her friend and bid her farewell, with many an injunction that she was to come back and see her again, very, very soon. But this interview with Cissy Bernard made Phyllis very thoughtful and somewhat distressed. This young woman had claimed her right to judge and act for herself, with a vengeance, but it did not seem to have been very successful. Phyllis had been too proud to ask Cissy *what* it was that evil tongues were saying of herself, but she had heard too much scandal of others not to be able to give a good guess at it. She was in the full swing of her coveted freedom at this time, going out day after day, and night after night, *when* she liked—*where* she liked—and with *whom* she liked—for there is always plenty of amusement in London for such as care to seek it. But she could not conscientiously say that she was as happy as she had hoped to be. Something was sadly wanting—though she fiercely denied that it was the company of her husband. She yearned for some faithful friend in whom she might repose implicit confidence, without fear of ridicule or blame. She wanted her sister Nelly, and wrote rather reproachfully to Sedgeley

because her promised visit was so long delayed. What was her surprise to receive in return a letter from her father, calling her an ungrateful cat, and informing her that Frederick Arbuthnott was not only staying at the Manor House, but engaged to Lady Helen, and the wedding was to take place as soon as possible.

"It's all your doing, my Lady Phyllis [wrote the earl], so if it turns out as sorry a business as your own, I shall expect you to pay the piper. The young man certainly improves on near acquaintance, and he has satisfied me that he can keep the girl better than I can. I wish it had been Camilla or Winifred, instead of my good Nelly, but it is one more off my hands, so I ought to sing Te Deum. I believe it was a put-up job between Arbuthnott and Nell (or perhaps you have had a finger in the pie), but he declared he could not spare the time to go out to Mexico and see after my mines, unless he made it his wedding trip, and killed two birds with one stone, so I believe they have settled to start in two months' time. Nelly is writing you full particulars of how he looked, and what he said, etc., after the manner of your mean sex, so I will leave the rest of the news to her, and am your affectionate father

"LISNOR.

"P. S. Any tidings of your scamp?"

Nelly's letter, to which Phyllis turned next, was full of gratitude to her dear sister for having worked the oracle so successfully on her behalf and expressions of thankfulness to Heaven for the supreme blessing of the love of Frederick Arbuthnott. Lady Phyllis rejoiced in the good news, but she cried as she read it. It seemed so hard that Nelly should be happy, and through her means, while she was so very sad—that she had been able to compass her sister's good fortune while her own was irrevocably wrecked. Her engagement to Ronald Macnaughten, consented to by the earl after much opposition, had given her just as much pleasure as this; she, too, had hoped, or rather confidently expected, that her future life would be one long dream of bliss. And

here she was at two-and-twenty, worse than a widow, because unprotected and unable to marry again. But at that thought Phyllis shuddered—the way in which the mere notion of Ronald's death affected her should have opened her eyes to the farce she was enacting, but none are so blind as they who will not see. Lady Phyllis' remedy against the sad thoughts that would sometimes intrude themselves upon her gayety was always Roy. She seemed to turn to her little son to drive away her melancholy. So now she cast her letters to one side, and called to Reynolds to dress the little man for walking, as she was going to take him across the Gardens to call on Mrs. Warrington and tell her the good news. Roy was very proud to go out with his mamma, but he dragged at her hand and fatigued her, and when they entered the Broad Walk, she let him run on in front, while she sauntered slowly behind, musing on the topics which interested her most. Presently she heard the child ejaculating her name, and looking up, saw him advancing to meet her, with his hand fast clasped in that of Miss Vipan. The sight considerably annoyed her.

"I have brought Master Roy back to you," exclaimed the shrill voice of the secretary. "He was quite too far ahead. It is not always safe for such very young gentlemen to run about the Park by themselves."

"Thanks!" replied Phyllis coldly, "but I believe I am quite capable of taking care of my own child. He was perfectly safe. I never miss sight of him."

"Well, *I* couldn't see you, and I really did not know if he was by himself or not. He does not speak very plainly. What age is he?"

"Three," said Phyllis curtly.

"Bless me! You don't say so. Why, my brother has a little girl of only three and a half and she can read words of one syllable without the slightest difficulty."

"Really!"

"I was so sorry for that business at the club, last committee day," went on Miss Vipan confidentially; "it would never have occurred without Miss Noble. She is really the most spiteful creature on the face of the earth. I have always said so. Her animus against poor Mrs.

Bernard was all because she is so pretty. Don't you agree with me?"

"If you ask my opinion, Miss Vipan, I thought the committee were unanimous in voting that her name should be struck off the books. I do not say if it was just or unjust—but it was not what I had expected."

"It was a thousand pities you resigned. They will regret it to the last day of their lives. They are already discussing how they can get you back again. But *I* had no hand in it, Lady Phyllis. You must please to exonerate me. The secretary has no vote, remember."

"Indeed, I never asked the question."

"Oh, dear, no! My duties are simply secretarial. And all my feelings point the other way. You should have heard the battles I have fought in your defense, lately. You would not require to ask on which side I am, then."

"In *my* defense?" exclaimed Lady Phyllis proudly.

"Yes, certainly. Oh, you have more enemies than you think for. But whenever I have heard unkind allusions made to your gentlemen friends, or hints about Lord Percy Sefton being so intimate at your house, I always stand up for you and ask them what proof they have of their scandal. Lord Percy, I say, is her own cousin by the father's side, and who has a better right to be with her now that she is alone and unprotected? Why, a cousin is next door to a brother, isn't he? and when they titter and suggest that cousins can marry all the same, I tell them it must be their own evil thoughts that put such an idea into their heads."

Phyllis was so indignant at this speech that for some moments she could not command her voice sufficiently to reply without showing what she felt, but when she had somewhat recovered herself, she said:

"Miss Vipan, it is nothing to me what people say or think about me, neither do I care to hear it repeated. It is extremely good of you to take up weapons in my behalf, but I wish you would not trouble yourself to do so again, as I am perfectly able to take care of my name and reputation; and were I not so, my father Lord Lisnor would be the proper person to resent the insult."

She spoke with such quiet sarcasm that most people would have refrained from irritating her further, but busybodies like Miss Vipan can never take a hint. They are not thin-skinned enough. They will allow themselves to be snubbed and brow-beaten, again and again, and still return to the attack.

"Ah! but the earl will never hear it—that's just the way with scandal-mongers; they slink round the corner directly they are likely to be brought to book. Now, as I was saying to Lady Alexander the other day, what could have been quieter or more discreet than your conduct while you were in the Pushahead. I don't think you ever introduced a gentleman there once. But then she—and fancy, my dear Lady Phyllis, a woman like *that* presuming to question the actions of anyone—insinuated directly that 'still waters ran deep' and that she would rather trust a woman who carried on her flirtations openly, a dozen times over, than one who knew how to keep her own counsel. So ill-natured and unladylike! But I gave her my mind about it, you may rest assured of that. I told her you had a right now to do exactly as you thought fit, and it would be a very strange thing if a beautiful young woman like yourself had not a swarm of admirers round her, and it was Mr. Macnaughten's business and that of no one else. Was I not right?" looking up with her little keen ferrety eyes into Phyllis' face, which was working with rage and suppressed emotion.

"Quite right!" she said, after a pause, "so right that I shall be obliged if you will carry out your principles in your own person, and leave my private affairs alone for the future. What I do, or do not do, concerns you no more than it does Lady Alexander Fox, or any other member of the Pushahead Club. Good-morning," and Phyllis attempted to pass Miss Vipan and pursue her way alone. But the little scandal-monger was not to be shaken off so easily. She trotted alongside of her victim while she kept on chattering:

"But you would not have me keep silence when I hear a friend's character attacked, would you?"

"I do not consider you my friend, Miss Vipan."

"But I *am*, all the same, and you can't prevent it.

When I have once made a friend, I never let her go. I am true as steel to those I love. And I told you the first time we met that we should see a great deal of each other. I think you should take some means to stop Miss Noble's tongue. She heard that you called her book indecent, and it has made her very revengeful toward you. She spread the news all over the club last week that you had been seen in some improper place with Captain Rashleigh, who she says is a well-known *roué* about town, and that if Mr. Macnaughten got wind of the affair, it would mean the divorce court. Now that is libellous, you know, and I should speak to my solicitor about it, if I were you. Of course, as I said, it is not likely that you would go to any place where a lady could not go; and as to the gentleman, perhaps you do not know the reputation he bears; or, if you do, you are on your guard against him. But I only repeat it to show you what ill-natured things people do say, and how they make a mountain out of a molehill, when one has excited their spleen. I don't suppose they would have dared to say a word about you, or at least not openly, if you had not thrown up the vice presidentship of the club."

But this proved a trifle too much for Phyllis' forbearance. She turned upon the little woman by her side, as if she would have slain her.

"How *dare* you," she said, "repeat these libels to me? Do you not see that if I chose to consult my solicitor concerning them, as you suggest, that you would have to come forward as a witness against those who uttered them, and then you would lose your club friends as well as myself? Look here, Miss Vipan; understand me once for all. I do not wish to hear you, nor see you ever again, and if you persist in annoying me by intruding yourself on my notice, I will take more stringent means to rid myself of you. I do not care one pin what you or your club associates say or think of me, but I will not be annoyed by listening to your repetitions. So be good enough to leave me alone, and do not presume to speak to me when we may next meet, for I decline to know you henceforward."

"You will repent it, Lady Phyllis Macnaughten!"

replied Miss Vipan, livid with rage, "you will repent you ever spoke those words to me!"

"I could repent nothing more than putting myself in the way of your malevolent tongue," said Lady Phyllis, as at last she managed to get rid of her tormentor.

But though she told herself that it was of no consequence, and that she did not care what anybody might say of her, women *do* care about such things, and will continue to care till time ends. She walked on rapidly till she had reached Mrs. Warrington's door, but when she was ushered into the presence of her friend she found herself totally incapable of speaking, and ended by bursting into a flood of tears. Mrs. Warrington was the sort of woman that no one minded breaking down before or telling one's trouble to; and before long she had heard how her girl-friend's pride had been wounded, and soothed it with just the kindly balm that was needed. They had a long confidential talk on the subject, and Lady Phyllis found the counsel which she needed in her perplexity. Of course the engagement which promised so much happiness to the people dear to them was fully discussed, but the other matter was not neglected, and when Lady Phyllis returned home that day it was with a full determination to write to Ronald and tell him of her annoyance. Why should she not, she argued? He had told her at parting to consider him as a friend—to consider, indeed, that they parted because they were friends and wished each other well. He could not think it strange, then, if she elected to consult him as to what she should do to stop the vile tongues that were gossiping away her fair fame. Her fame concerned him as much as herself—he was the proper person to take up the cudgels on her behalf and bring the offenders to book, and Phyllis was so conscious of her own innocence that she never doubted but that Macnaughten would accept the story as she chose to tell it him. She sat down therefore and wrote him a letter—brief, and not more than friendly—in which she told him that she needed his counsel and assistance, and depended on his parting promise to afford it her. She asked him to say when and where she could meet him, as the story was too long to put on paper. She

was conscious of a quickening at her heart as she wrote this request and imagined what it would be to see him and to speak to him again. But she had nowhere to send her letter but to his solicitors', and in reply she received an intimation that Mr. Macnaughten had quitted town again without leaving any address, but that as soon as he returned it should be forwarded to him. Meanwhile the days and weeks slipped away until another month had run its course, and still Phyllis had received no answer to her letter.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE AFTERMATH.

It is surprising how two people who know each other may live in London year after year and yet not meet, except by appointment. Lady Phyllis did not see Macnaughten in the Park nor the streets, nor did she hear from him; and nothing would induce her to make a second appeal to his generosity. She chose to believe that he had received her letter,—he must have received it by that time, she argued,—and since he had not taken the trouble to answer it, it meant, perhaps, that he also had heard the vile slanders which were circulated concerning her and believed them, or did not care if they were true or false. Lord Charteris had made her almost break down one day by making some insinuations about Ronald and a French singer who had lately appeared at the Empire and taken the town by storm. She had persuaded herself then, after deliberation, that his lordship's story had been merely rumor, but she did not say the same thing now. There must be some reason for her husband paying no attention to her letter—what so likely as that that "something" was another woman, with whom he was too much occupied to have time or inclination to think of his wife? It was evident that she and her affairs were of quite secondary importance to Ronald.

Meanwhile the preparations for Lady Helen's marriage with Mr. Arbuthnott were going on at Sedgeley, and Phyllis took great pleasure in selecting such presents as she thought her favorite sister would appreciate, and which she intended to take with her when she attended the wedding a month hence. She was coming out of a fur store in Waterloo Place one day, where she had been choosing a costly mantle which she hoped would be use-

ful to Nelly on her projected voyage, when she caught sight of her husband on the opposite side of the street. She was certain it was he. She could not mistake his slight, graceful figure, nor the proud way in which he carried his head. The sight almost took her breath away. She forgot in one moment all her conclusions regarding his want of attention to her wishes; she only felt that he was there, back in town, close at hand, and that she must speak to him. Women are seldom at a loss in an emergency. In a moment Lady Phyllis had turned to her coachman and desired him not to keep the horses standing any longer, as she should not be ready for another half hour, but to drive them up to Portland Place and back again. The man touched his hat with his whip in token of having understood the order, the footman resumed his place on the box, and the carriage whirled out of sight. Almost as soon as it started Phyllis gathered up her skirts and ran across the road in pursuit of her husband. She was acting on impulse as usual, she did not consider what she was doing, she only knew that Ronald was there and she must see him and speak to him, if she died for it.

Mr. Macnaughten, who was on his way to his club, became aware of a swift footstep following his own, but had hardly stopped to consider if it was in pursuit of him, when he felt a light touch on his arm. He turned suddenly and saw his wife standing beside him, with her lips parted from the exertion she had made, and her large hazel eyes beaming upon him, wide open with excitement. The sight was so unexpected that it paralyzed him. He turned as white as a sheet, and was quite unable to articulate a syllable. The parting with her had been so bitter, the meeting was so unexpected.

"Ronald!" she panted, as much from repressed excitement as from exertion; "Ronald, pray speak to me—I must speak to you—I have something very particular to say."

"But why—why," he questioned in his first surprise, "could you not write?"

"I have written and I have had no answer," she said, almost crying; "I suppose you have not received my

letter, but—— Oh, do wait and hear what I have to say to you now !"

But by this time Macnaughten's natural reserve and self-command had returned to him.

"Not here, Phyllis," he replied ; "this is no place for private conversation, but if——"

"Will you come home to my place with me? I live at——"

"I do not want to know where you live," he interrupted her; "I have purposely refused the information, so please do not tell me. It can be of no moment to either of us. But if you feel equal to walking a little way in the Park, we can speak to each other there."

"Oh, yes, I can walk—miles, if you like," replied Phyllis, with her old impetuosity. "I hope you don't mind coming a little out of your way; but it is something of importance."

"I do not mind," he answered quietly, as they commenced to walk down to St. James' Park side by side. "But you are not walking by yourself, surely," he added, with some concern.

"Oh, no ; I sent the carriage on a little. I did not want the servants to see me stop you. They might have thought I was slightly improper," said Phyllis, with a little laugh.

"I trust that under any circumstances they could never think *that*," he returned gravely.

"I was shopping at the fur stores," went on his wife rapidly, "when I caught sight of you on the other side of the way. And oh, Ronald, what do you think? Nelly is to be married next month to Mr. Frederick Arbuthnott !"

"Indeed ! And is that a matter of congratulation?"

"I don't know about congratulation, but they are very happy. But so were we at first."

"Phyllis," said Macnaughten gravely, "if you really have something of importance to say, please to say it and have done with it. You must know that this interview can be productive of pleasure to neither of us. It is useless to prolong it more than is absolutely necessary. What is your business with me?"

"Just what I wrote in my letter a month ago," said Lady Phyllis, with a *moue* of her rebellious little mouth.

"But I have received no letter from you, so you must please to tell me what you mean by word of mouth."

"Not received it?" cried Phyllis. "What can that old booby Arbuthnott mean by not forwarding it to you?"

"Stop! Don't blame the wrong person. I have been in Paris, and did not leave any address behind me. I only returned last week and have not yet communicated the fact to your solicitors, so you see the fault, if any, lies with me."

"And why did you not leave your address?" demanded Phyllis, with something of the old wifely authority.

"Am I obliged to answer that question?" said Macnaughten. "I had divers reasons; one being, perhaps, that I did not wish to be followed by letters which could give me no pleasure to read. You must allow a man a little time in which to court forgetfulness, Phyllis."

"In company, I suppose, of Mlle. Lalage," she retorted, with an air of offense.

"Lalage! What on earth do you mean by connecting my name with that of one of the most notorious women in town?"

"On the authority of your great chum, Lord Charteris," replied Phyllis. "It was he who told me that she was a particular friend of yours, and that young Hindes had had supper with you in her company at your own chambers, wherever they may be."

"Then Charteris told you the biggest lie that ever passed his lips," replied her husband angrily, "and if Hindes said that he ought to be kicked. No one has ever supped with me in my chambers, for the very good reason that I have none. I am looking out for some at the present moment, and have stayed hitherto, when in town, with my sister Mrs. Dallas. So you see the whole story is a fabrication."

"People will say anything to get themselves listened to, I do believe," said Phyllis, with a little less assurance. "Just see what they have dared to say about me. Oh, I forgot! you have not received my letter."

"What was it about, then? Why did you write to me?" asked Macnaughten, with his eyes upon the ground, though his wife looked up to his face all the while.

"Well, when we agreed to separate, Ronald, you must remember that you said we were to continue friends, or else I shouldn't have troubled you. But women are such wretches! What do you think they have been saying now—that Percy Sefton is much oftener at my house than he should be, and, if you will believe me, I have only seen him once since we parted."

"I do believe you," replied her husband, "for he has spoken to me about it, poor fellow! and made me ashamed that I should ever have made a disparaging remark, even in jest, of such a little gentleman. Sefton and I are great friends now, Phyllis; in fact, he was in Paris with me, and I feel I cannot do too much to make up to him for having wounded his sense of honor as I have done."

"But it is not only Percy—they say I have been seen at an improper place with Captain Rashleigh, and that he is a known *roué*—and that I have a swarm of men always round me—and it is not true, Ronald," continued Lady Phyllis excitedly; "they are infamous falsehoods, and the people who circulate them should be exposed and punished."

"And who are the people who so slander you, Phyllis?" asked Macnaughten, half amused at her angry vehemence.

"Those abominable creatures at the Pushahead Club. I have left it, Ronald, I threw up my vice presidentship and refused to belong to them any longer—and they say all sorts of things against me now, for revenge. Spiteful, horrid women! And fancy, even Lady Alexander Fox has the impudence to join her voice to the rest—and say that I flirt a great deal too openly. Lady Alexander Fox! It is really too funny! Why, she is not fit to be known by any decent woman!"

Ronald Macnaughten, being a man, did not remind his wife at this juncture that he had told her the same thing long before. He only said very quietly:

"Well, and what is it then that I can do for you?"

"Stop these horrid scandals. Tell the people who spread them that you will have them up for libel. If *you* deny them, the world will know they must be false."

"Not necessarily. And were I to deny these to-day, more would crop up to-morrow. I am afraid they are unavoidable. When husband and wife part the world *will* gossip, and it would be impossible to make it believe that there is not some stronger reason for such a step than mere incompatibility of temper."

"But it is a falsehood!" cried Lady Phyllis hotly; "you know it is—it must be—that I have ever cared for any man, since—since——"

"Since you were so deluded as to imagine that you cared for me."

"No, I was not deluded—neither of us was," she answered frankly. "We did care very much at the time, only——"

"We mutually found out that we were not worth caring for, and so you, for one, grew tired of pretending——"

"Well, I suppose it must have been so, but I shall never care for anybody so much again. Do you remember the first time we met, Ronald?"

"I have forgotten nothing, Phyllis, but it has ceased to give me any pleasure to remember. Please not to allude to such things. They are past and can never be recalled. And they are not a pleasant contrast to the present."

"Yet I wish——" said Lady Phyllis.

"What is the use of wishing now?"

"I wish that we had been older. I think we might have managed things better."

"I do not think our youth had anything to do with it. I see where the fault lay. We saw too much of one another. We were sickened with each other's society."

"But people who really love *cannot* see too much of one another."

"I have learned they can. *Toujours perdrix* is a mistake all the world over. If men and women were wise and did not exhaust their resources, mental and physical, so soon, their admiration and esteem would last longer.

Our minds require friction with larger minds in order to breed fresh ideas. I feel sure of that now."

"Have you been trying the experiment?" asked Lady Phyllis.

"In a measure," he replied.

"And has it answered?"

"In a measure," he repeated; "but how can we expect anything to answer with either of us now? We have wrecked our lives. We are like a broken pitcher that can never be mended again. We have lost the road to perfection. Each of us must be a unit while time lasts, unless indeed Death mercifully frees one of us from a chain that galls without binding. But this is idle talk. You have asked me what I can do for you, in this social dilemma, Phyllis, and I fear I must answer, nothing. You have elected to look after yourself, and I am sure you are quite capable of so doing. Either bear the brunt of your sex's malice without shrinking, or do away with the cause of it. I can give you no better advice."

"I am sorry I troubled you, then," replied Phyllis, trying her utmost to keep back the proud tears that had risen to her eyes; "but I will not detain you longer. I see that your offer of friendship was only a sham. The first time I claim it, it fails me," and she turned in order to retrace her steps to Waterloo Place. Macnaughten followed on her heels, for a moment, in silence.

"Don't say that, Phyllis," he replied presently; "don't think it. Were you in need of friendship and required mine, you would not find it fail you. But you ask me what is impossible—to deny facts."

"Facts!" she exclaimed angrily.

"Is it not a fact that you accompanied Rashleigh alone to the Alhambra? You see people are not slow to repeat things to me. Does Rashleigh bear a good character among women, and is the Alhambra a proper place for my wife to be seen in? You know how often I refused to take you there myself. You are your own mistress now, and I do not pretend to direct what you shall or shall not do. Only, it is impossible for me to go forth like Don Quixote and tilt at a shadow. The antagonist I should want to engage would be the man

who took you there—not the ladies who said it was an improper thing to do."

"Oh, you are against me, as you always were," cried Lady Phyllis, in a muffled voice, as she hurried to the spot where her carriage was waiting for her.

Macnaughten handed her into it as courteously as he had been wont to do in the days of old, and stood on the pavement, bare-headed, until she had driven off. But Phyllis did not see him. As soon as she found herself alone, she sunk as far back as the cushions would permit her, and gave vent to her mortification in silent tears.

From that date she resolved that she would never write to her husband or notice him in any possible way. She would live her life as he evidently wished she should do—alone.

She attended her sister's wedding in due course, and did her best not to let her own trouble intrude, like Banquo's ghost, upon the marriage feast. But they all remarked at Sedgeley how thin Phyllis had grown, and how much larger and more wistful her hazel eyes seemed to be. Perhaps Lady Helen, in the selfishness of an all-engrossing passion, did not notice the difference in Lady Phyllis so much as the older sisters did; but it was a common remark down at the Manor House, even after the bride and bridegroom had started on their honeymoon to Mexico and Phyllis had rejoined her little Roy in Kensington Palace Mansions.

The suites of rooms in that locality were built in pairs on every floor, and the first news Reynolds had to give Lady Phyllis, on her return home, was that the flat opposite her own had been let and was being furnished in handsome style. It was taken by a single gentleman, the servant went on to say, but the workmen did not know his name. She continued to give descriptions of the suite of morocco and the suite of saddle-backs, and the beautiful carpets and the splendid pictures and the luxurious bedroom fittings that had arrived until Phyllis was weary of her gossip and begged her to cease. The position and possessions of this gentleman, she averred, were of no possible interest to her, and she was tired with her journey from Hillford and wished to rest.

So the garrulous nurse, somewhat offended in her dignity, withdrew with her charge and left her weary mistress alone. Ah! if her attendants and friends had only known *how* weary she had grown of late, and how dissatisfied with herself and everything around her, they would have been surprised. She felt as if the taste had gone out of everything on earth, and sometimes turned away even from the contemplation of her child, simply because he reminded her so painfully of his father. She scarcely gave a second thought to the stranger who had taken up his residence in the flat opposite to hers, and certainly felt no curiosity on the subject, until one morning, as she was going out rather earlier than usual with little Roy, and had stepped outside her own door, the handle turned of that on the other side of the landing, and to her amazement her husband stood before her. Roy gave vent to a scream of delight and rushed at his father's legs, but his mother stood silent and motionless, not knowing what to do or say. In a moment the old scandal had rushed into her mind, and she fancied that Macnaughten could not be living in so large a flat, alone. He seemed as paralyzed by the encounter as herself.

"Are *you* living here?" he exclaimed; "can this be actually your residence?" His nervousness gave her courage.

"It is," she answered; "awkward, is it not? But, doubtless, you were only visiting an acquaintance."

"No, no!" he stammered, while the child clung to his legs, shouting, "Papa, papa!"—and then he continued; "But I did not know—I had no idea—I would have gone to the other end of London, sooner than have appeared——"

"You mean to say, then, that you *do* live opposite—that *you* are the gentleman who, we were informed, had taken the flat—well, what if you have? It won't poison you to live on the same floor as myself, I suppose. There is no necessity for any communication between us. You need not alarm yourself. I shall not be the one to intrude on you now or ever. Come, Roy; we must go for our walk," and Lady Phyllis tried to detach the child from his father. But Roy would not let go, but continued to

wail: "Papa, papa! take Roy with 'oo! Mamma go by herseff, Roy stay with papa."

It was an awkward dilemma—the boy vehemently refusing to quit hold of his father, and his mother obliged to entreat and coax without avail. At last, losing patience and fancying maybe that Macnaughten was enjoying her perplexity, she pulled Master Roy so violently away that he began to roar lustily and she was compelled to take him back into her own rooms. She bowed to Macnaughten, as she disappeared, in order to prove how completely she was at her ease, and then she slammed the door and he saw her no more.

He did not know what to do—the discovery of who was his opposite neighbor had worried him quite as much as it had done Phyllis. His was a sensitive nature, and he feared lest she should think it had been a plot on his part, and that he had known of her vicinity; whereas he had never had the least idea of it, and would have gone, as he said, to the other end of the town sooner than have settled down beside her. He returned to his own quarters and thence wrote her a letter in which he told her the truth, and offered to give up his flat at once and move elsewhere if she had the least objection to his living so near to her. The answer he received was as follows:

"I cannot see what earthly difference it can make if we live under the same roof or twenty miles apart. We shall be as separated on the opposite sides of this landing as if you were in Kamchatka. The only awkwardness about it is with regard to the child, but I have been obliged to confide the fact of your proximity to Reynolds, and she will guard against any more encounters like that of this morning. At the same time, if you would like Roy to visit your rooms at any time, you have only to say so. It may be more convenient for you than going to meet him in Delamere Gardens. Don't forget that we have promised to remain friends, and of course, in any little matter like the above, I am only too pleased to fall in with your wishes.

"Yours,

"PHYLLIS."

"*Yours—yours*—" groaned Macnaughten, after having read this letter, as he laid his head on the table—"what a mockery! And she thinks it is no worse to live on the same floor with me than if I were in Kamchatka. That is a woman all over. I don't believe they have any real feeling, or know what the pangs of such a separation as this mean. 'The only awkwardness about it is with regard to the child.' That's it! That's the only awkwardness—well, well! I was a fool ever to dream she cared for me as I cared—no! as I *do* care, God help me!—for her!"

But he did not change his lodgings, all the same. He received an excellent offer to do so from the agent to whom he had mentioned the possibility of his moving again, but he declined it at once, and told the man that he had changed his mind. He cast many a longing glance at the opposite door as he went in and out of his own rooms, but never again did he encounter Lady Phyllis upon the landing, though his child paid periodical visits to his rooms, and pulled everything about until they were left in utter confusion, without any woman's hand to rearrange them.

Macnaughten was too proud to question Roy with regard to his wife. Never a word did he say to him about his mamma, but the little boy often mingled her name with his baby conversation. One morning, as he was sitting on Macnaughten's knee, he looked up gravely and asked quite irrelevantly:

"Why do my mamma ky?"

"Your mamma cry?" interrogated Macnaughten. "But does she cry, Roy?"

"'Es, 'es!" replied the boy, nodding his curly head, "Mamma *do;* mamma ky when she and Roy in room, nighttime. Mamma go, boo! boo! boo!" said the child, trying to convey his idea of a woman's weeping.

This innocent remark on the part of Roy set Macnaughten thinking. Why should Phyllis cry indeed, unless it were for the thought that she was chained to himself. She had nothing else to cry for. Youth, health, beauty, and money—she possessed all four; what more could she desire, unless it were her freedom.

"I wish that I could give it her," he thought to himself. "Poor child, she is too young to look forward with complacency to a future without companionship or the real joys of home. If I had only been older and wiser and better fitted to have the charge of a woman, I might have prevented all this misery."

He went often to see his friends the Leytons, but he never told them of the strange chance that had brought him within a stone's throw of his wife; and as the doctor had no time to pay visits in his non-professional capacity, he and Mrs. Leyton were never made aware of the fact. One afternoon, however, on returning to his rooms, Ronald Macnaughten encountered Lady Phyllis again. She had ascended half the staircase that led to their floor, and halted on the first landing to regain her breath. It was impossible to pretend not to have seen her.

"Been out for a walk? Tired?" he said nervously, as he came upon her.

Phyllis flushed scarlet at the unexpected meeting.

"I am—a little," she faltered. "It is milder to-day; don't you think so?"

"I don't know. I have been in the City; it was cold enough there," he answered.

She was blocking up the gangway so that he could hardly pass without troubling her to move, so he waited until she should do so. Phyllis' hands were full of violets—his favorite flower. He could not help noticing them.

"What beautiful violets!" he said; "they smell delicious."

"Take them," replied Lady Phyllis, holding them out to him, and then, seeing he hesitated, she added:

"You need have no scruple. My rooms are full of them. Rose sent me a basket of them from Sedgeley yesterday. You used to love violets."

Macnaughten accepted the flowers with a grave "Thank you!" and Phyllis commenced to ascend the remaining stairs. When she reached her own door, she paused for a moment and said timidly:

"Would you like to see my rooms—they are so pretty?"

"No, thank you, I won't trouble you," said Macnaughten, but she interrupted him:

"What nonsense! It is no trouble; and I should like you to see them." Then, observing his hesitation, she added: "What is the good of pretending we are still friends, Ronald, if you won't even enter my rooms. Come in and let me make you a cup of tea. Do you ever take afternoon tea now?"

"No," he answered curtly.

"And you used to be such an old woman for your tea," she said reproachfully. "Come then, and have a cup with me."

He told himself that he was a fool to yield to her persuasions, but Phyllis was pouting her mouth at him and looking from under her eyelashes in the old way; and after all, it is rather hard for a man to remain stoical when his lawful wife is tempting him against his better judgment.

"Very well," he said suddenly, "I will."

She rung the bell, and they were admitted by the footman.

"Bring tea into the drawing room, John," said Lady Phyllis, as they entered, "and bring in the kettle. I wish to make the tea myself."

"Very good, my lady," said John, wondering what new freak her ladyship had in her head now.

"This way," cried Phyllis gayly, as she passed through a *portière* into the room beyond, which was draped in primrose color and scented heavily with violets.

"Now you can smell my Sedgeley violets," she said; "and are not my rooms pretty? Sit down in that armchair and amuse yourself with those papers while I take off my bonnet."

She whisked away, as she spoke, into an inner room, leaving Macnaughten seated in the armchair and feeling very foolish at finding himself the guest of his own wife. He had half a mind to get up and run away before she returned, but she was too quick for him. In a few moments she was back again, leading Roy by the hand.

"I don't think the little boy can be quite well to-day," she began; "he seems so dull and cross. Reynolds,"

she continued, to the servant who followed in her train, "can he have eaten anything to disagree with him? He seems quite feverish to me."

"No, my lady. He has had nothing but the dinner you ordered for him—a mutton chop and rice pudding."

"He seems very heavy," said Phyllis, as she took the child upon her lap, "and his cheeks are burning. He must have taken cold."

"He didn't loiter, my lady, and I only kept him out for an hour, as it came on colder when the sun went in."

"Poor little man!" said Phyllis, caressing the child. "Well, that will do, Reynolds. I will ring when he is ready to go back to the nursery." The nurse, after a respectful courtesy to her master, withdrew to her own domains, just as John appeared with the tea. Lady Phyllis placed the child in his father's arms, while she busied herself with the kettle and the teapot. As she handed a cup to Macnaughten, she said:

"There! I would bet anything you have not had such a cup of tea as that since we—we—I mean, since I left off making it for you."

"There are many things besides tea that I have had to give up since then, Phyllis," replied Ronald.

"Ah, well! and so have I," she rejoined, in a would-be airy tone; "but every blessing has its bane, you know. We can't have it all our own way. Don't you find that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?"

"I would rather not discuss it," he answered quietly, as he looked down at Roy, who had fallen asleep in his arms.

"You have grown very brown," Lady Phyllis went on presently, as she looked at him; "that is the effect of your Norway trip, I suppose. By the way, you have never told me how you enjoyed it. Was it very delightful? Did you meet any nice girls to flirt with? You won't own to Mlle. Lalage, but I suppose you have a 'mash' of some sort; eh, Ronald?"

"Have *you?*" he said, in his quiet manner, as he raised his eyes to hers.

Lady Phyllis colored up to the parting of her hair.

"*I?* Why, of course not? That would be quite a different thing."

"And why?"

"Oh, I don't know! But you men are different from us. You never *are* faithful for long to anyone."

"That may be your opinion, Phyllis, but it is not necessarily correct. All men are not dishonorable or irreligious. I may not have proved myself to be a very estimable or lovable character in your eyes, but I have been faithful to you."

"And so have I to you."

"I never questioned it. I should not have dreamed of mentioning the subject, had you not started it."

"Well, there is one comfort," said Lady Phyllis; "so long as we are faithful and true to each other, there is no possible reason why we should not remain friends. You know I thought the separate establishment theory a mistake, Ronald."

"I remember you did."

"But since you considered it best, we need not go to the lengths of never seeing each other. I think it would be nice to have a cozy chat sometimes, or even to go to the theater together. Why not? What is the obstacle?" asked Phyllis, with beaming eyes.

But Macnaughten sat moody and troubled in his chair.

"I have already told you, Phyllis, that it cannot be. I am afraid I have been foolish in coming here this afternoon. It cannot be agreeable for me to be waited on by your servants, while they do not recognize me as their master. Women never seem to think of such things, but men do. And it must be for the last time."

"Oh, no! don't say that," replied Lady Phyllis, pulling down her lip, like a child about to cry, "for it is so nice to see you sitting there like old times. Besides, it is selfish of you, because there are so many little things in which you could help me. A man is always useful in a house."

"Have you not innumerable friends to whom to go in an emergency?" said her husband. "Why should you torture—I mean, trouble me. Cannot your lady friends advise you on these important topics."

"Perhaps so—only——"

"Only what?"

"I don't care to go to them; they are not like—you were. No one can be so intimate, or know all about one, like a husband. There is so much to explain to strangers; and then, they don't understand, somehow."

"There are always difficulties in the formation of a new life," replied Macnaughten, with apparent indifference. "No rose, you know, without its thorn. And to balance it, you have the opportunity of hearing new ideas and gaining fresh information, instead of being dependent, day after day, upon the same old fount of knowledge. You must not be ungrateful, but weigh these advantages against the trifles you allude to."

"I know all that," said Lady Phyllis petulantly, "only—only—when one comes home, there is no one to tell one's new thoughts to, and it is so lonely," she added pathetically.

"Have a lady companion," suggested Macnaughten, as he rose suddenly and put Roy off his lap, who thereupon began to cry. "Then you can have a good talk together, whenever there is no one better at hand."

"*A lady companion!*" echoed Phyllis indignantly, as she caught up her weeping child. "As if I would! The most obnoxious, mischief-making, interfering people in the world! I should think you might suggest something better than that."

"I was never bright enough for you in the olden times, remember," he said, laughing, "so you cannot expect me to have improved by now. Good-by, Phyllis, and thanks for your hospitality," and seizing his hat from a side table, Macnaughten flew to the sanctuary of his own rooms, feeling that he could not stand the interview any longer.

Roy was still wailing, and Phyllis summoned Reynolds to take him away. How empty the room looked without either of them! She tried to read and divert her thoughts, but she had never felt so lonely since she and Ronald had parted company. Had she been rash? Ah! had she been rash, and thrown all her happiness away—sold her birthright for a mess of pottage, which had no power to stay the hunger of her heart? She did not know, or she would

not say—but she ended the evening by a prolonged fit of weeping, and retired early to bed.

As she entered her room she found Reynolds in the adjoining apartment, bending anxiously over the cot which contained her boy.

"Why are you here, Reynolds?" she inquired.

"I don't like the looks of Master Roy, my lady," replied the nurse; "he is certainly feverish, and he gave a cough just now of which I did not quite like the sound—'twas terrible hard."

Phyllis, who knew nothing of children's ailments, did not dream that there could be danger in a mere cough.

"Why not give him a dose of syrup then, Reynolds?" she said.

"I'll wait a little, if you please, my lady, and see if he coughs again."

But as the child appeared to be sleeping quietly, Reynolds after a while withdrew and left her mistress alone.

Phyllis lay down, wakeful and uneasy. Her head ached from crying, and her eyes were swollen and inflamed. That one question would keep turning itself over and over in her brain—had she spoiled her whole life from over-rashness—would Ronald ever consent to make it up with her again?

As she was musing thus, toward the hour of one o'clock in the morning, she heard Roy commence to turn and toss in his little bed, and roused herself to say some soothing words to him. Her voice apparently waked him, and he gave a single cough. But such a cough! Phyllis had never heard one like it in her life before—it sounded as if the child had coughed through a brazen trumpet.

"Roy! Roy! my pet, what is the matter?" she exclaimed, leaping from her bed and hastening to that of the child. But Roy was not awake. He was only turning restlessly in his sleep. His cheeks were crimson and burning hot—he had thrown the bedclothes off him—and his mother commenced at once to cover him up again. Her touch roused the child—he sat up suddenly in bed with an air of alarm—and then he gave another hollow cough, which seemed to resound through the apartments, and bursting into sobs threw out his arms before him and

battled fiercely with some unseen foe, while he appeared to be choking with his efforts to breathe. Phyllis was dreadfully alarmed—she threw on a dressing gown, and ran bare-footed to Reynolds' room across the passage, and knocked violently at her door.

"Come quickly! come quickly!" she cried. "Master Roy is ill—I am dreadfully frightened about him."

The nurse was with her in another minute.

"Ah! deary me! it is as I feared, the blessed dear! He has got the croup."

"*What?*" cried Lady Phyllis, in a voice of terror.

"The croup, my lady. We must get some hot water at once and put him in it."

"Hot water!" said Phyllis despairingly, as the cough rang out again through the room, and poor little Roy battled the air with his hands in a vain endeavor to regain his breath, "at this time of night! Why, it will be an hour before it is ready."

"We can't help that, my lady; we must put him into a hot bath as soon as possible. You stop by the sweet lamb, and I'll wake up John and send him for the nearest doctor. We mustn't lose time, my lady; these attacks often carry them off in an hour. I'll get the hot water as soon as ever I can."

And hurrying away, she left Lady Phyllis with her little son.

The croup, the croup! What was the terrible memory that flooded her mind at the moment that she heard the word? Ah, Mrs. Warrington! with the trouble of her life. Her little son so like Roy, and the account she gave of him. "A little walk—a little cough and fever—and in a few hours he was gone." Mrs. Warrington had lost her child—she, who was so good and true to all—and how could *she* hope, Phyllis' heart whispered to her, to keep her boy, when she had played so remorselessly with the happiness which God had given to her? She worked herself into a frenzy of grief and terror during the time she was left in charge of Roy, and the cough returned again and again to make the poor child fight for his life. She heard the manservant leave the flat in search of the doctor, but it seemed ages before Reynolds returned with

the hot water for the bath; and just as she entered the room, Roy, who had been struggling with an unusually violent fit of coughing, suddenly fell back on his cot, black in the face and working in every limb.

"Good God!" cried the nurse, as she flew to his side, "he's in convulsions. Oh, my poor lady! be prepared for the worst. He's going, for sure. Oh! my blessing! my dear lamb!"

She seized the convulsed infant in her arms, and held his shuddering limbs as still as she could. But Lady Phyllis stood by her side, silent and motionless. She had heard Reynolds' words, she understood that the life of her boy was in imminent danger, was trembling on the brink, but yet she neither cried out nor spoke. She felt as if she were turned to stone, only one thought had power to stir her paralyzed brain; Roy was going and his father was not present, did not know it; might lose his cherished son without seeing him again. She did not wait to consider if her deed might be misinterpreted, but acted on the spur of the moment.

"Reynolds!" she cried, in a suffocating voice, "he must not go without the master seeing him. I will fetch him."

She tore past the wondering maids, who had been roused by the general confusion and were whispering together in the passage, and, darting across the landing, knocked violently at the door of Ronald's rooms. She did more than knock; she hammered upon the panels so continuously that Macnaughten himself was alarmed, and thinking the premises were on fire threw on his dressing gown and appeared at the open door, simultaneously with his servant.

"Ronald! Ronald!" cried Lady Phyllis breathlessly, "come at once, Roy is dying! Come and see him again."

There was no time or need for explanations. Those awful words, "Roy is dying!" rang like a death-knell on the father's heart, and pale as ashes he followed his wife back to her own apartments. There they found the nurse still supporting the child, and gazing with terror into his face. Roy had ceased to shudder and writhe,

but lay still and white as a broken lily, with his eyes fixed and his heart almost pulseless.

"Have you hot water? Put him in a hot bath instantly," exclaimed Macnaughten, and he took the boy in his own arms while Reynolds filled the bath for his reception. As Lady Phyllis saw her husband take command as it were, and place the child in the bath himself, her self-control gave way and she knelt down on the ground, shaking with her grief.

"Don't despair, dear," said Macnaughten, hardly knowing what he said, "the doctor will be here immediately. Children are often like this. See, the warm water has comforted him already; he has ceased to shudder."

But still Phyllis knelt by her husband's side, with her face hidden in her hands, weeping bitterly.

"He will die," she murmured; "I know it, I feel it. It is a punishment on me for—for everything. My child is dying, I have thrown away my happiness—I had nothing left but him, and now I shall have nothing at all, *nothing!*"

Macnaughten did not answer, but he stretched forth the hand which was unoccupied and laid it gently on the head of the young mother, who had bowed herself almost to the dust.

The child now lay perfectly quiet. Macnaughten lifted him from the bath, and wrapping his body in a blanket held him across his knees, while he waited for the doctor's verdict. But Lady Phyllis still knelt where he had left her, in utter despair.

The terrible suspense was soon relieved by the entrance of Dr. Greene, bustling, cheery, and hopeful, though he had been pulled out of his bed at one o'clock in the morning to attend an unknown patient.

"Why, why, why! what is this?" he exclaimed, as he looked at the child lying on his father's lap. "A case of croup, followed by convulsions. Poor little fellow! Well, we'll soon set him all right. Have you some mustard, nurse, and some ipecacuanha wine? That's right. Now a teaspoon, and a compress for the little throat. Is it his first attack? Ah, I supposed so, or you would have known better what remedies to employ." And in a few

minutes he had Roy in his cot again, with the mustard and compress applied, and sensible though very weak and sleepy.

"*Is he dying?*" whispered rather than said Lady Phyllis, as she ventured to raise her head and watch what the doctor was doing.

"Dying?" replied Dr. Greene. "Nothing of the sort, madam. You will have to be careful of him for a while—very careful; but a fine, strong child like this doesn't die of his first attack of croup. He'll be all right after a few hours' rest, but I shouldn't take him out till the weather is milder. It's his stomach and the cold combined; nothing to be frightened at. Now, nurse, do you quite understand what to do? That is right, and you won't leave him again to-night in case of the cough returning. Good-night, madam; I'll look in to-morrow morning and see how the little man goes on."

"And are you sure, *quite* sure, that he is safe?" said Phyllis, turning up her pallid face to meet that of the doctor.

"Quite sure for the present, and the future depends on yourself, madam," he replied, as he gazed with interest on her lovely features.

"Oh, thank God! thank God!" cried Lady Phyllis, as the doctor bowed himself from the room, and she sunk down upon her knees and hid her face once more within her hands. Suddenly she felt an arm thrown around her.

"Thank God, too!" said Ronald softly. "What should we have done without our boy, Phyllis?"

"*We*, who have lost each other," she replied, weeping.

"But have we lost each other, sweet wife?" he whispered; "are you sure?"

"I have been so willful," sighed Phyllis.

"And I so determined to bend your will to mine."

"But I was in the wrong, Ronald."

"And so was I—doubly so, since I had the stronger nature."

His arm was still round her; it was so sweet to feel its warm, protecting clasp.

So, creeping closer, their heads drew nearer to each other, and with their heads, their lips.

"Can you forgive?" asked Phyllis humbly.

"Can you?" was all his answer.

"Yes," with a deep-drawn sigh. "I have done it long, long ago."

"Then let us draw a sponge across the record once and forever, darling. I have been miserable without you."

"And I—oh, so very, very wretched, Ronald!"

"Let us end it then, for Roy's sake."

"For Roy's sake!" she murmured.

For Roy's sake, she turned her face toward his and opened wide her arms, and, for Roy's sake, they loved each other forever afterward, without a break.

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